

cattails



October 2020

cattails: The Official Journal of the United Haiku and Tanka Society

October 2020 Issue

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Butterfly photographs by Debbie Strange, Canada

Cover Photo: Rusty-tipped Page Butterfly (*Siproeta epaphus*) - Costa Rica

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Introduction

Shakespeare's words have a certain poignancy this year for us in the Northern Hemisphere:

"summer's lease hath all too short a date . . ."

Sonnet 18

But the sense of the transience, I am sure, also resonates with our friends in the Southern Hemisphere.

This quintessential aspect of our human condition is eloquently captured in the poems in this issue of *cattails*. With dedication and perspicacity during these difficult times, the editors, Susan, Lavana, Geethanjali and Gautam have read and showcased your poems. Susan needs no introduction as a renowned tanka poet and editor. We are privileged and delighted that she joins us from this issue onwards. Kala has risen to the challenges of the pandemic to showcase young haijin from various sources, including the students of Tom Painting, USA.

Our special thanks to Debbie Strange for her fabulous photographs of butterflies to illustrate the journal. No issue is possible without Mike's calm, patient work behind the scenes and the care he takes with the layout of the journal. Alan, Neal, Marianna and Erin have been unfailingly steadfast and generous in their support and help.

Sonam Chhoki

Haiku



Starry Night Cracker Butterfly (*Hamadryas laodamia*) - Costa Rica

first light
the way birdsong
envelopes a pine

Bryan Rickert, USA

dawn rumble
the moon rolling
on a train

Adjei Agyei-Baah, Ghana

daybreak . . .
the sunbird starts pecking
at its own image

K. Ramesh, India

how delicately
she plucks each leaf —
the little elephant

Lysa Collins, Canada

morning mist
over stems of grass
rooks fly-hopping

David Gale, UK

pond goslings
a toddler peeks over
her stroller

Brad Bennett, USA

spring breeze
a child I do not know
smiles at me

Nathalie Buckland, Australia

tapping along
to an old fiddle tune
spring rain

Ben Gaa, USA (EC)

a seashell sings
past golden curls
the child's smile

Robert Witmer, Japan

the gentle face
of a nuzzling mare
favorite niece

Erin Castaldi, USA

spring sowing . . .
wild orchids on the less fertile
part of the farm

Rachel Rabo Magaji, Nigeria

blossom breeze
a little girl practises
pirouettes

Jan Dobb, Australia

bhumichampa
the earth gives away
its purple secrets

sanjuktaa asopa, India

the anger within . . .
the geranium's new leaves
unclench their fists

James Chessing, USA

repeating
the Sanskrit mantra . . .
a sapsucker taps

Cyndi Lloyd, USA

blackened forest . . .
ferns unfurl
tender fronds

Rohan Buettel, Australia

raindrops
on an Amaltas bloom . . .
a brief respite

Ashish Narain, Philippines

family reunion —
the salad bowl
full of sunrays

obiteljsko okupljanje —
zdjela salate
puna sunčevih zraka

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

ink dark sky
the glow of wisteria
by lantern light

Jill Lange, USA

a thin crack
in the midnight blue vase
daffodils

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, USA

one breath
is all it takes . . .
falling blossoms

Elisa Theriana, Indonesia

spring hail . . .
transitioning into
another life

Edward J. Rielly, USA

beyond heaven
a child's breath scatters
dandelion seeds

Rp Verlaine, USA

poppy field
too many names
to remember

Gregory Piko, Australia

strawberry moon
all that remains
to be seen

Michael Henry Lee, USA

lockdown—
high meadow sheep
visit the village

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

quarantine . . .
travels of a snail
on the same leaf

quarantena . . .
viaggi d'una lumaca
sulla stessa foglia

Lucia Cardillo , Italy

June rain
a hint of blueberry
in a child's smile

Anna Cates, USA

summer solstice
a copper prayer wheel
slows to a stop

Alan S. Bridges, USA

summer breath
black-eyed susans
stir in the tussock

Gary Hittmeyer, USA

paddock fence
the disdainful stare
of a cow

Quendryth Young, Australia

summer taxi ride . . .
the colorful blur
of my Kyiv

літня поїздка в таксі . . .
розмиті барви
мого Києва

(Ukrainian)

Nicholas Klacsanzky, USA (EC)

mango breeze . . .
the stories of many
childhood summers

மாஞ்சோலை காற்று . . .
கடந்து போன கோடைகளின்
குறுங்கதைகள்

(Tamizh)

Srinivas S, India

ranunculus field —
when the rainbow unweaves
its colors

câmp cu ranunculus —
când curcubeul își destramă
culorile

Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania

as if their field
were a Bach cantata
grazing flocks

Hazel Hall, Australia

rainbow . . .
the shadows of me
scatter as one

Bhawana Rathore, India

sticky heat
the yin and yang
of mating slugs

Aron Rothstein, USA

windblown rain
the smell of a woman
sticks to me

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

summer day the length of a dog's tongue

Julie Warther, USA

lavender trumpets
of hosta blossoms —
cricket song

Elaine Wilburt, USA

buttermilk sky . . .
gusts bind my geraniums
to the balustrade

Cynthia Rowe , Australia

nesting season —
magpies in a swooping
of black and white

Keitha Keyes, Australia

asphalt heat
the curbside echidna
turns up its nose

Mira Walker, Australia

a black hawk
circles the perimeter . . .
summer heat

Susan Beth Furst, USA

a magpie plucks
at the frayed clothesline —
sunlit morning

Samantha Sirimanne Hyde, Australia

happy hour
the dog and I
swimming at sunset

Kanjini Devi, Aotearoa NZ

power out
I stop to watch
an inchworm inch

Dian Duchin Reed, USA

old garden shed —
rotten planks
bejewelled by snails

Amanda Bell, Ireland

a bumblebee swings
on a blue phacelia
late summer breath

Ernest Wit, Poland

daddy long legs
stepping through
a glass world

Michael J. Galko, USA

red snapper
the ventral notch
left by a shark

Bill Cooper, USA

late summer
a battered butterfly
slower to take flight

David J Kelly, Ireland

green kudzu
the road's sharp curve
collects crosses

David Oates, USA

gathering clouds
the blackbird's song
changes key

John Hawkhead, UK

distant thunder
the billowing silk strands
of the orb-weaver's web

Mark Miller, Australia

coming up
to gasp for air
the second wave

Jay Friedenberг, USA (EC)

high country storm
a thunder of hooves
tattoo the wind

Gavin Austin, Australia

lack of air
the heaviness
of small words

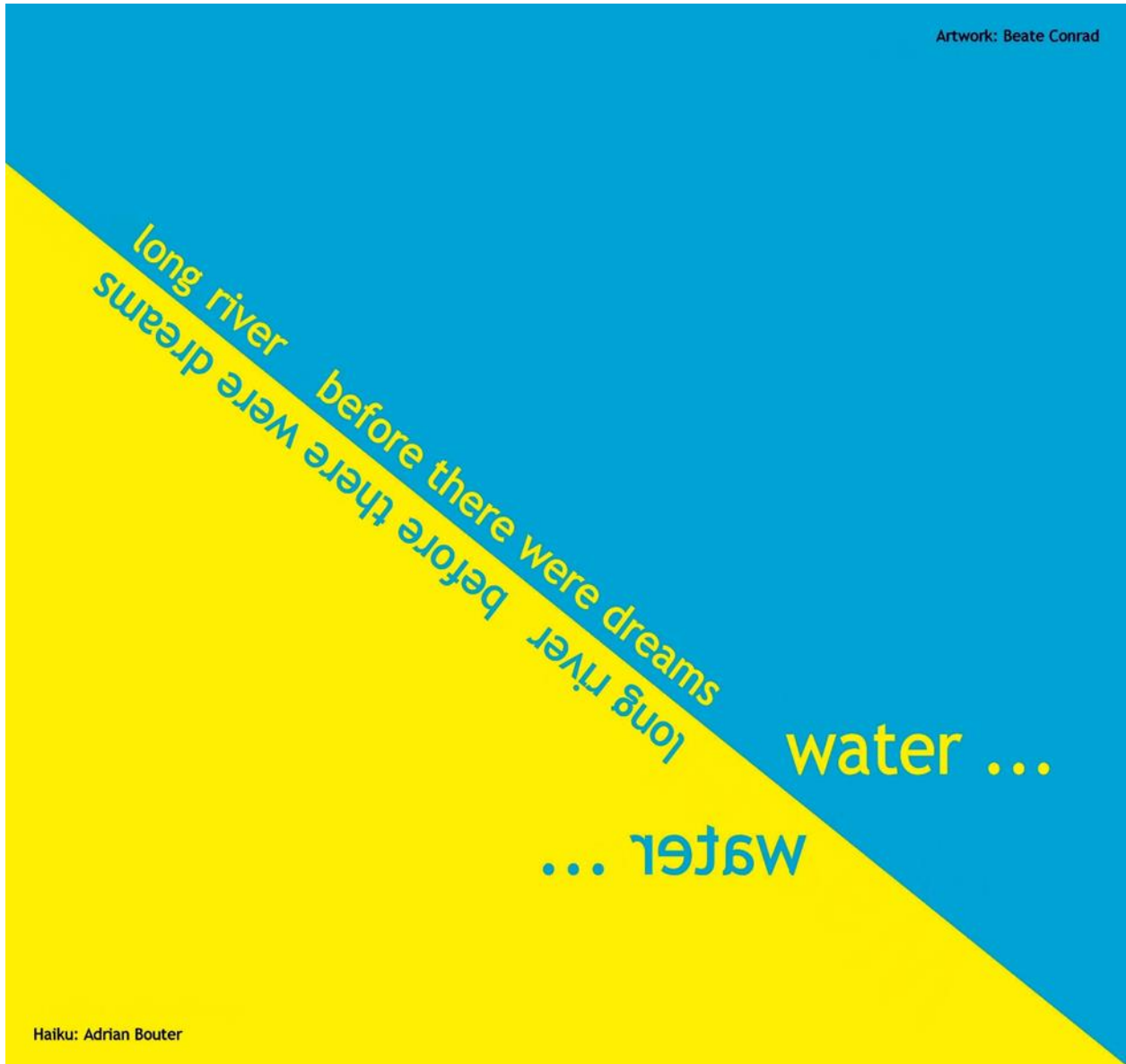
недостиг на въздух
тежестта
на малките думи

Nadejda Kostadinova, Bulgaria

start of autumn
thoughts about you
leaning in the rain

Meik Blöttenberger, USA

Artwork: Beate Conrad



Haiku: Adrian Bouter

morning light
the exotic moments
of courtship



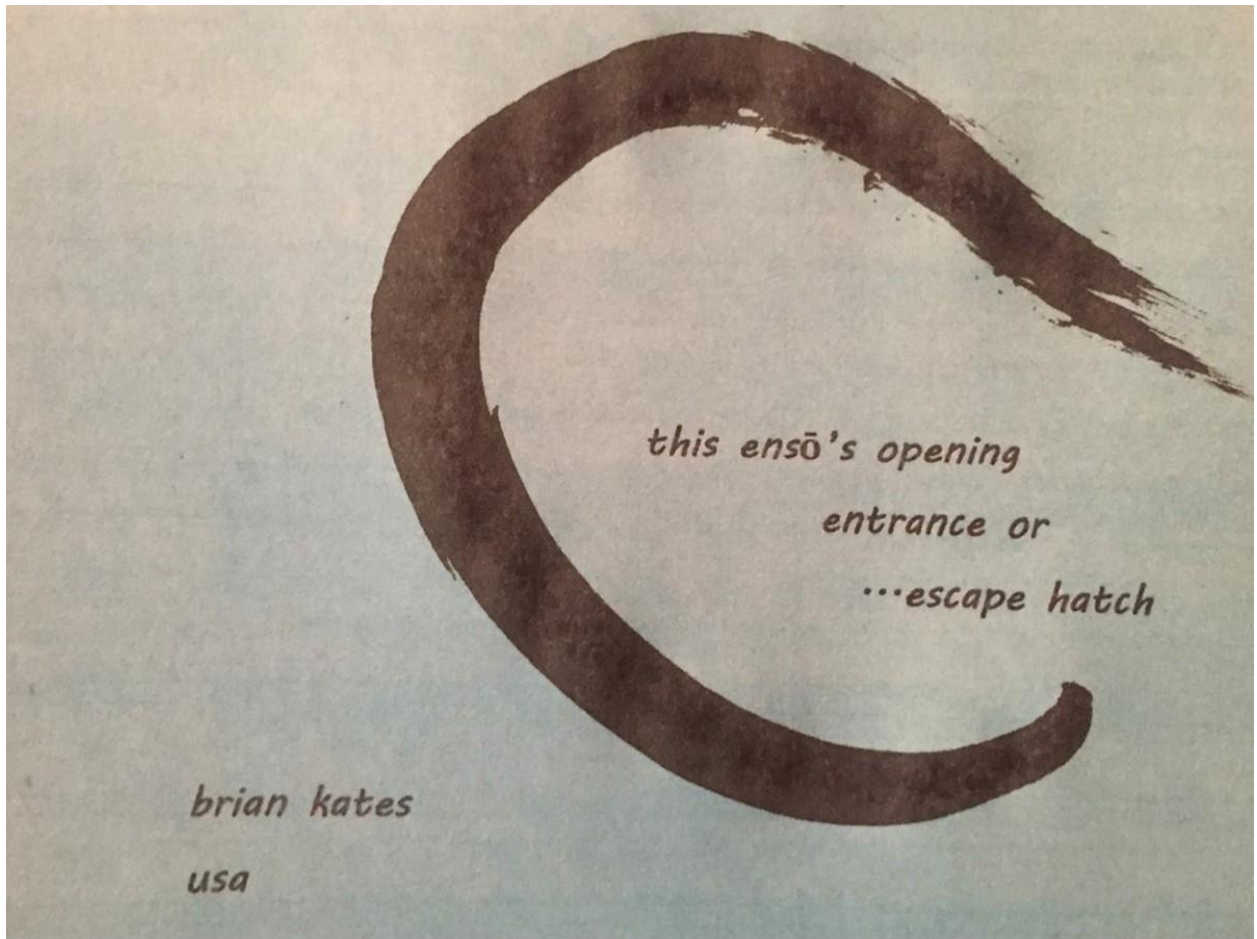
an iridescent train
rattles with attitude



country roads
a hint of donkey
and hay . . .
minor delays in our journey
to self-acceptance.

Haiku: Anna Cates
Artist/photographer unknown





turning to gold
against a turquoise sky —
copper chestnut

Mike Gallagher, Ireland

autumn sunset
blazing at the horizon
the maple forest

Marianne Sahlin, Sweden

equinox
from shore to shore
the silver light of moon

równonoc
od brzegu do brzegu
srebrne światło księżyca

Zuzanna Truchlewska, Poland

passing by . . .
the soft rasp
of the oak leaf's fall

Ryland Shengzhi Li, USA

autumn leaf
the hold
begins to slip

శరత్కాలపు ఆకు
పట్టు
సడలుట మొదలైంది

(Telugu)

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

almost home
more stars than leaves
in the elm

Carol Raisfeld, USA

starlings enliven
the withered oaks
rookies on the bench

Stephen S. Power, USA

lunaria . . .
how to arrange moonlight
in a cut glass jar

Lorin Ford, Australia

autumn rain
the sidewalk splattered
with leaf prints

Nancy Shires, USA

cloudless night
the moon shadow
of a periwinkle

Marietta McGregor, Australia

leaf by leaf
autumn tossed
against windows

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

leaf-drip
stillness and tremor
in the fishpond

Simon Hanson, Australia (EC)

autumn chill
the shudder of the lift
going down

Bob Lucky, Portugal

Caravaggio
how brilliantly he paints
the darkness

Ivan Randall, Australia

autumn equinox . . .
the fairy tales
growing darker

Angela Terry, USA

crescent moon . . .
she asks me if they took
the other half

Praniti Gulyani, India

mild autumn night —
a nurse takes off
her mask

Milde Herbstnacht —
die Krankenschwester nimmt
ihre Maske ab

Beate Conrad, Germany

harvest days
this need to re-learn
to eat

Deborah P Kolodji, USA

nutmeg
the pungent smell
of the autumn woods

noce moscata
l'odore pungente
dei boschi autunnali

Eufemia Griffo, Italy

autumn moon —
shadow of the branches
at my doorway

luna d'autunno —
ombra dei rami
alla mia porta

Daniela Misso, Italy

autumn mist —
blackbirds preening
in charred grapevines

Jerome Gagnon, USA

solitude
the moon wanes
beyond the hills

eenzaamheid
de maan neemt af
voorbij de heuvels

Michael Baeyens, Belgium

hunter's moon
the crimson stain
of blueberry barrens

Kristen Lindquist, USA

pale autumn
off a headstone
the shadow of a doubt

David Kāwika Eyre, USA

low tide
the weight
of moonlight

ОТЛИВ
вЕС
ЛУННОГО СВЕТА

Nikolay Grankin, Russia

autumn exodus
the tattered wing
of a monarch

Kevin Valentine, USA

autumn evening —
I come to the end
of my journals

Ruth Holzer, USA

an old fashioned clock —
its hands still show
the time of death

starinski sat —
kazaljke mu pokazuju
vrijeme smrti

Nada Jacmenica, Croatia

November
the grapes harvested
without you

Novembre
grappoli d'uva raccolti
senza di te

Antonietta Losito, Italy

my father stares
at the rain-streaked window . . .
morphine drip

我父親凝視
滿是雨滴的窗戶 . . .
嗎啡點滴

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

winter rain
how quickly a morning
can derail

Agnes Eva Savich, USA

frosty night
a mother's shadow
changing diapers

John Budan, USA

freezing fog
the intermittent embers
of rose hips

Debbie Strange, Canada

last rites
I carry our lily
to the compost

Dan Curtis, Canada

in the shadows
a man with a shovel
graveside service

Robert Moyer, USA

dad's last rites . . .
my uncertain steps
on warm pebbles

Kanchan Chatterjee, India

winter solitude
a crow caws from the top
of a telephone pole

John Mcmanus, England

pruned rose bush
winter's hush
of introspection

Madhuri Pillai , Australia

memorial garden —
matching names
with plants

Laurie Greer, USA

hiding
behind the tombstone
setting sun

nascosto
dietro la lapide
sole al tramonto

Maria Concetta Conti, Italy

full moon—
the ash carried
by the wind

luna piena—
la cenere trasportata
dal vento

Carmela Marino, Italy

weeping willow
among the dark leaves
the river sparkles

Žalosna vrba
Između tamnog lišća
svetluca reka

Zoran Doderovic, Serbia

karthik full moon . . .
a row of clay lamps
hold darkness

कार्तिक पूर्णिमा . . .
दियों की एक क़तार
अंधेरा समेटे हुए

(Hindi)

Priti Aisola, India

brought by the wind
on the mountaineer's grave
. . . a birch stick

donesen vjetrom
planinaru na grob
. . . brezov štap

Nina Kovačić, Croatia
Translated by Đurđa Vukelić Rožić

white nights —
the loaded silence
of the acacia trees

noptile albe —
tăcerea încărcată
a salcânilor

Carmen Duvalma, Romania

my birth
between these dates—
wildflowers for mom

la mia nascita
tra queste due date—
fiori di campo per mamma

Margherita Petriccione, Italy

windswept
ocean and dunes
the life within me

Jenny Fraser, New Zealand

fresh mint
between cobble stones . . .
thoughts of Grandma

Marilyn Ward , UK

charting
maps of age . . .
spider veins

Pat Geyer, USA

northern lights
the white owl's echo
in a minor key

Ellen Compton, USA

moonlight
in my window
the zafu's shadow

Mary Stevens, USA

gnarled oaks
another winter
comes between us

Joanna Ashwell, UK

answering
with another question
hoot owl

Kat Lehmann, USA

where the river
returns to the surface —
oasis of hope

Michael Dudley, Canada

Editor's Choices (EC)

Many parts of the world are continuing to struggle - some are yet to restart after the pandemic, while others are slowly trying to get back to the world of last year. It has been an incomprehensible time of great tragedy, suffering and terrible anxiety. Amidst all this are consolations in the way of beautiful moments captured by poets from across the world. Poets have sent in their haiku in great numbers, selecting from which has been a difficult task for me this time. My gratitude to all those who submitted (a great many this time) and to those who sent in their translations of the selected haiku. I join my fellow editors in offering these moments of creation to you, along with my prayers and wishes for resilience, recovery, and a rediscovery of the beautiful world around us.

The pandemic has brought out the necessity to renegotiate our surroundings. I have chosen a few haiku for you to engage with. These haiku are multi-layered and convey a sense of the world as it is now. Perhaps, the poet meant to write in a particular way to mean something specific, but the reader has to give haiku a life of its own too. In current times, haiku that does not tell us how to feel but points us in the general direction, is what I have chosen to comment on.



coming up
to gasp for air
the second wave

Jay Friedenber, USA

The poet portrays a summer image of a surfer or swimmer in the sea. It's a beautiful sunny day at the beach when a surfer is caught off-guard by a huge wave, perhaps. The use of the word 'gasp' suggests that the wave was in control and not the person. The haiku could have been read as an innocuous or a slightly unnerving situation a surfer was put in.

But this year isn't a normal year, is it? Skilfully, this layered haiku brings in the pandemic we are facing now by the use of the word 'second wave'. This haiku is also an example of the use of a seasonal reference, 'wave', to indicate summer activities at the beach and the more nuanced use of 'second wave' to indicate this very year - 2020. Many countries have flattened the first wave of COVID-19 but are expecting a second one. Thank you, Jay Friedenber, for showing us that the right use of simple words can still make the most powerful images. For now, I am grateful that we can still 'come up' to get that air.



leaf-drip
stillness and tremor
in the fishpond

Simon Hanson, Australia

From another part of the world, Simon Hanson brings us a classic poem filled with contrast and with an economy of words. This haiku made me calm down and take a breath even when I was rushing to send off my acknowledgment of submissions to poets. The minuteness of observation and the use of concrete images to set off a response in the reader are valuable skills in haiku.

In line 1, the use of 2 short words, 'leaf-drip', makes it clear that the reader has to pause after line 1. If the poet had used the words without the dash (leaf drip), it would have led to ambiguity, as well as confused the reader as to where to pause. But Simon Hanson's haiku is a lesson in paying attention - to the stillness and the tremor, to the leaf-drip, to the larger fishpond, to economy of words, to contrasting emotions and to the acceptance of what is around us. Do also reread it in the context of what is happening in 2020.



tapping along
to an old fiddle tune
spring rain

Ben Gaa, USA

The music in Ben Gaa's poems is always endearing but the joy in this haiku is what reached me first. The first two lines create an image of music created by man and the old fiddle tune takes us to our own favourite music. While still in that realm, line 3 brings in a beautiful surprise – the music of spring rain, of the songs of nature that are heard only if observed keenly. The haiku offers us enough space to step in and enjoy the tune. Was the poet tapping along or was it the rain? Why was the tune an 'old fiddle tune'? I leave it to you.



summer taxi ride . . .
the colorful blur
of my Kyiv

літня поїздка в таксі . . .
розмиті барви
мого Києва

(Ukrainian)

Nicholas Klacsanzky, USA

In this haiku, Nicholas Klacsanzky sets a summer mood for a taxi ride. The poet sets the scene and gets us to hold the scene in our minds with the deft use of ellipsis to mark the pause. This is an unusual but interesting use of the ellipsis which I see used by most poets to hold a moment of stillness. As with any ride, the beautiful place whizzes by in

a blur. And then, line 3 says which place it is – Kyiv. The poet’s thoughtful use of the word Kyiv instead of the more known Kiev (in English) and the use of that one word – my – elevates this haiku to many layers. What could have been a description of just another taxi ride becomes a personal memory and a moment open to everyone who wishes to engage with the beautiful sentiment of ‘home’, wherever that is. Thank you for the Ukrainian translation, Nicholas.

In gratitude,
Geethanjali Rajan

Senryu



Blue Morpho Butterfly (*Morpho peleides*) - Costa Rica

recycling newspapers
hoping for
better news tomorrow

Nancy Shires, USA

high scree trail —
remembering the formula
for potential energy

Michael Galko, USA

cold arrives,
announces the forecaster
sweating

Zeljko Vojkovic, Croatia

starlit sky
fortune teller looks for
his own fortune

Srinivas S., India

big foot
in his mouth again —
the leader of the free world

Keitha Keyes, Australia

kitten adoptions
hoping one will
choose me

Michael Henry Lee, USA

missing door stop
we talk about
everything else

Barbara Sabol, USA

old forestry school
its timbered walls
an education

Rohan Buettel, Australia

downtown diner —
the same breakfast special
everyday

Angela Terry, USA

family album . . .
all those people
I don't know

Praniti Gulyani, India

virtual meeting
I put on
my smiley face

John Hawkhead, UK

divorce
she wipes the floors
with his pajamas

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia

school reunion
this time I wear
my confidence

Hemapriya Chellappan, India

cabin fever
the kids build a fort
with TP rolls

Ronald Craig, USA

ice cream social
only the shadows
too thin

Anna Cates, USA

old house
creaking on the steps
my knees

Bryan Rickert, USA (EC)

bonfire
yesterday's news
up in smoke

Quendryth Young, Australia

quarantined . . .
just when to check
on Schrodinger's cat

Julie Warther, USA

change of season . . .
I throw away what I was
two sizes ago

Lucia Cardillo, Italy

weightlifter
with each squat
his Superman briefs

Joseph P. Wechselberger, USA

paint & carpet
the new room in our old house
emptied of memories

Cynthia Rowe, Australia

blind date
arranging his cutlery
just so

dl mattila, USA

tennis court —
a steady volley
of profanities

Ryland Shengzhi Li, USA

haute couture boutique
the haughty faces
of mannequins

Ernest Wit, Poland (EC)

frostbite
if you think a white lie
never hurts

Elisa Theriana, Indonesia

used book sale
I buy back
all my donations

Maureen Virchau, USA

signs of aging
our young friend tells us
what we know

Hazel Hall, Australia

smoky old movie
a cigarette dangles
from everyone's lips

Gary Hittmeyer, USA

halftime over
the refilling
of barstools

Ben Gaa, USA

more swing
in Grandpa's step
Panama hat

Tom Bierovic, USA

winter funeral
a procession of headlights
at noon

Brad Bennett, USA

divorce day
I rehearse
my composure

Adjei Agyei-Baah, Ghana

wedding muhurat
the groom checks social media
till the last minute

Richa Sharma, India

kitchen mouse
the surprised squeaking
of my husband

Louise Hopewell, Australia (EC)

food truck —
I savour dinner
in another language

Susan Beth Furst, USA

Good Friday
a seagull steps up
for the bread

Jenny Fraser, New Zealand

newly divorced
the bed sheets smell less
of my ex

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

first line of defense
the dermatologist's
receptionist

Mary Stevens, USA

village fete
the toffee-seller's
toothless grin

Mark Miller, Australia

scooter ride
the priest's tuft flies
pillion

Rashmi VeSa, India

a street preacher
on the apocalypse . . .
words without end

Lorin Ford, Australia

unwrapped
a delicious piece of guilt
melts in my mouth

Tom Staudt, Australia

gathering light
the nightmare gallops
riderless

Gavin Austin, Australia

wedding dance . . .
bunched around her waist
too many hands

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

zazen by zoom
sitting in silence
backs to the screen

Jill Lange, USA

home from travel
the double pleasure
of podding broad beans

Lyn Reeves, Australia

empty cups
we pour more
of our emptiness

Bhawana Rathore, India

physics class
the rate at which
I doze off

Debbi Antebi, UK

better to give
than to receive
Christmas flu

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

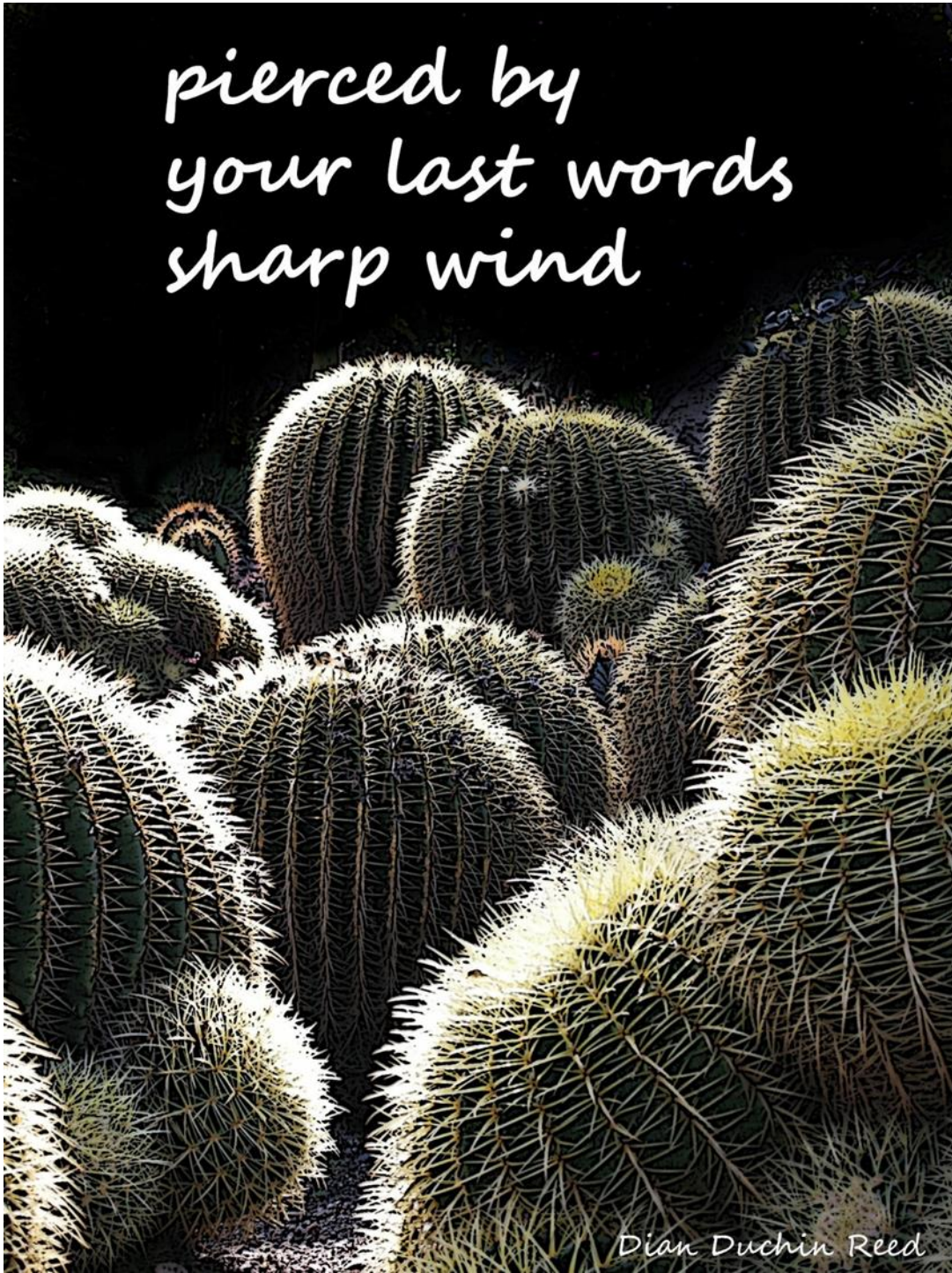
global warming
the extinction event
of snowmen

Debbie Strange, Canada

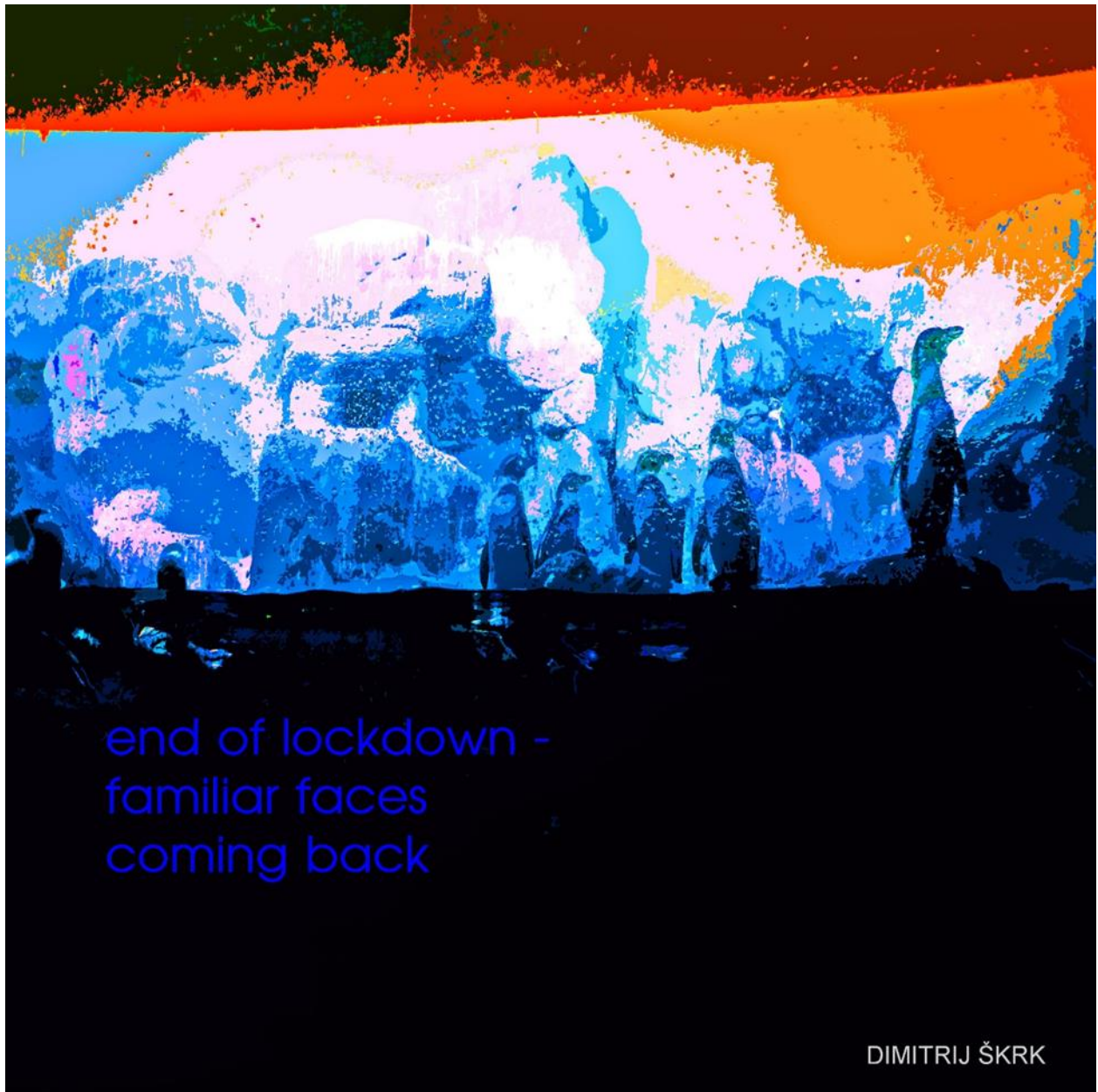


words/image©DStrange

*pierced by
your last words
sharp wind*



Dian Duchin Reed

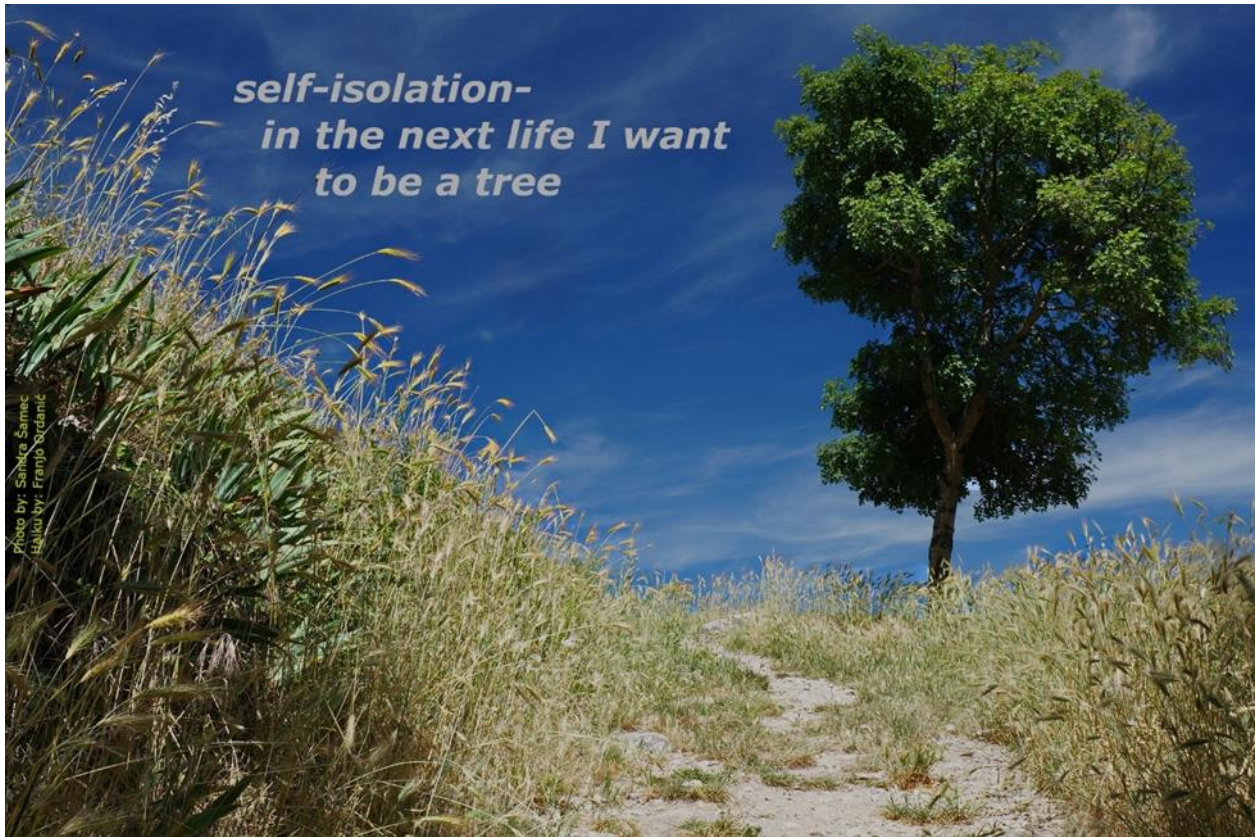


end of lockdown -
familiar faces
coming back

DIMITRIJ ŠKRK

**I follow you
carrying the veil
of innocence
our passion covered
with worries**

d.v.rozic



the best
laid plans . . .
empty mousetrap

Kathryn J. Stevens, USA

giving him
a flying kiss . . .
social distancing

Neha Talreja, India

isolation weary
the backyard birds
exhaust their repertoire

Madhuri Pillai, Australia

everytime
before we kiss —
wake-up alarm

Kinshuk Gupta, India

I gaze back . . .
just in time to catch
a memory

Pat Geyer, USA

food bank
the Minister's selfie
with the poor

Milan Rajkumar, India

peak of argument
two gentlemen
slip into mother tongue

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

my morning alarm
the gurgling sound
of Grandpa's gargle

Neha R. Krishna, India

white lie mountain
the smallness
of their truths

Peter Jastermsky, USA

taking the road
less travelled
a wrong turn somewhere

Nancy Shires, USA

New Year's Eve
the new pacemaker never
misses a beat

Michael Henry Lee, USA

biscuits and jam
her sticky hand
in mine

Barbara Sabol, USA

election fever . . .
the tea-seller promises
a bit of air

Praniti Gulyani, India

video call
the dog too
is awkward

Hemapriya Chellappan, India

tv talent show
young contestants all smiles
and braces

Ronald Craig, USA

sushi bar
one less koi in the tank
than last time

Bryan Rickert, USA

sultry evening
her French perfume
saying oui

Ernest Wit, Poland

night stroll
my vision for disaster
20/20

Elisa Theriana, Indonesia

heat spell
a street vendor raises
the price of water

Maureen Virchau, USA

an array
of open mouths
donut cart

Hazel Hall, Australia

evening calm
the fart makes its way
through the blanket

Ben Gaa, USA

a whatsit
and a thingamajig
kitchen drawer

Brad Bennett, USA

another birthday
Grandpa says he's too old
for dinosaur T-shirts

Louise Hopewell, Australia

at a loss for words the Scrabble game left unplayed

Susan Beth Furst, USA

not quite getting
the hang of it
yo-yo

Mary Stevens, USA

my neighbour's sax
hitting all the wrong notes
Covid-19 lockdown

Mark Miller, Australia

personality test
she tells everyone
she's an introvert

Rashmi VeSa, India

paper nautilus —
our biology teacher
comes out of his shell

Lorin Ford, Australia

new school term
the playground
empty of laughter

Gavin Austin, Australia

dust storm
a monk packs his home
in the blanket

Bhawana Rathore, India

clogged toilet
the expert
had much to say

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

nude beach
passing motorboats
slow down

Kathryn J. Stevens, USA

self-isolation —
my cat yawns
with me

Neha Talreja, India

another city . . .
the aroma of garlic
still the same

Kinshuk Gupta, India

monsoon night
reading again one more
unsent letter

Milan Rajkumar, India

Editor's Choice (EC)

old house
creaking on the steps
my knees

Bryan Rickert, USA

Bryan Rickert opens the poem by mentioning very casually, an old house, on line 1 and after deliberately and mischievously misleading the reader on line 2, as prosecutors in court would have it, where he talks about something creaking on the steps, which readers, naturally and naively assume is some other aspect of the old house, brings in the anticlimactic fact that they are in fact his equally aged knees. The technique of surprise has been used very effectively. It certainly bowled me over. Now I know for certain that every time my knees trouble me in future I will recall Rickert's poem and grin rather than grimace. Thank heavens for senryu!



haute couture boutique
the haughty faces
of mannequins

Ernest Wit, Poland

A thing I've noticed about haute couture boutiques is that the salespeople assume a very bored and haughty look as though it's such a drag to cater to the uninitiated hoipoloi who know nothing at all about high fashion. Barbarians! What could be more damnable than not knowing the latest rage among the socialites! It is perfectly justifiable therefore that even the mannequins here, sporting high-end designer garments, should have equally haughty expressions on their plastic faces. It adds to the overbearing ambience apparently. This wonderful senryu successfully suggests all this and more in just three lines.



kitchen mouse
the surprised squeaking
of my husband

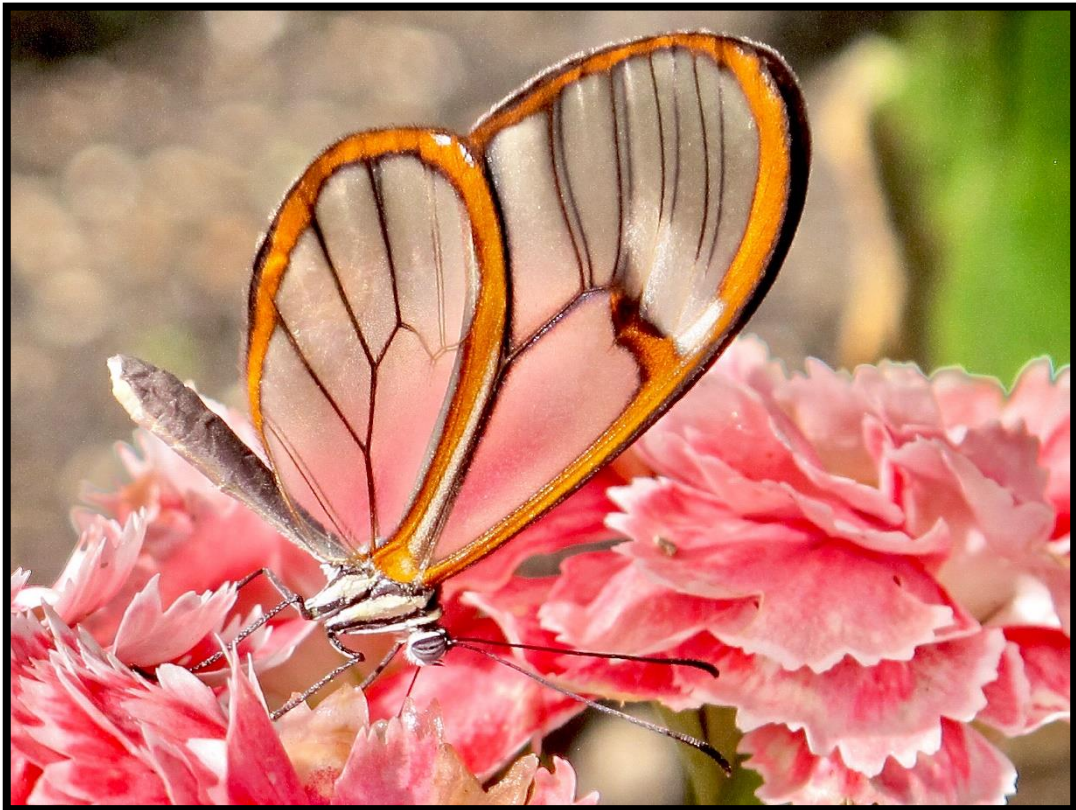
Louise Hopewell, Australia

A thing I've noticed about even knights in silver armour, gallantly dashing about on steeds saving damsels in distress from fire breathing dragons without so much as pursing their lips, go into a blue funk when faced with mice scurrying about the kitchen floor and the pantry. It's not their fault really. It's something to do with the genes, I am told. Under the circumstances what else can the brave husband, peering anxiously from behind his wife to see if it's safe, do other than squeak in surprise.



Gautam Nadkarni

Tanka



Costa Rica Clearwing Butterfly (Greta oto) - Costa Rica

Vietnam —
a different kind
of social distancing
his letters were all
I could touch

Pris Campbell, USA

I think of you
in another time zone
curled in sheets
the sheen of morning
settling upon your face

Gavin Austin, Australia

my wine glass
is filled to the brim
while yours
sits on the top shelf
gathering dust

Richard Kakol, Australia

savoring each drop
of sixty-year-old port . . .
no sign
through the dark glass
what's left in the bottle

Aron Rothstein, USA

and still
remembering the scent
that one fall day
a picnic in the woods at noon
desire rising between us

Carol Raisfeld, USA

I dip my toes
in a mountain spring
your shadow
for a moment
nibbling my ear

Marilyn Fleming, USA

I call her again
forgetting she's been gone
for weeks . . .
the moans of winter wind
become dark and darker

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

a toddler crouches
beside a puddle
engrossed
in the busyness
of tadpoles

Jan Foster, Australia

a desire
to fall over the edge
into mounds
of dune wire vine . . .
to be a kid again

Jenny Fraser, New Zealand

old diary
left open by the window
is that a breeze
that rustles its pages
or my sixteen-year-old heart

Sanjukta Asopa, India

the smell
of father's diary . . .
once again
that comfort
of being in his arms

Lakshmi Iyer, India

shivering
in this bitter cold
how I miss you
a child's pink mitten
forever lost in the snow

Maureen Virchau, USA

reciting
the number of deaths
night after night
the stars
free falling

Elisa Theriana, Indonesia

winter sun
pale against the wall
I crave
summer's hot nights
a sultry man's love

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

waking
early enough to see him
disappearing
around the corner
of my dream

Carol Raisfeld, USA

crimson hues
in the swirls of her skirt
an old flame
casting aspersions
on newfound love

Kanjini Devi, Aotearoa

love
once a brightly singing bird
now
a carcass picked clean
to its small hollow bones

Ruth Holzer, USA

as sunrise
draws our blanket away
the truth
lies between us
naked and cold

Urszula Funnell, England

torn from a dream
without farewell
I scramble
for the pieces
that held us together

Urszula Funnell, England.

making peace
with the broken pieces
of herself . . .
a single linen placemat
on polished walnut

Gavin Austin, Australia

the fragility
of petals in the wind
gathering the strength
to tell you
i am leaving

Pamela A. Babusci, USA

how many times
you must have wanted
to leave
was it a surprise
that I left first

Gregory Longenecker, USA

first night
without my cat
I stay up late
to avoid the dark
of her absence

Jeanne Lupton, USA

the requirements
of study at college
unimportant —
I discover my wings
on the ballroom floor

Keitha Keyes, Australia

the importance
of being myself
yet I wonder
how much time I've spent
in someone else's aura

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

as I paint
the morning sky
in shades of orange
what matters
is the hidden azure sky

Lakshmi Iyer, India

watermarks
paint the canyon walls . . .
my chanting
reverberates until
I am one with sound

Debbie Strange, Canada

a cowboy
with his worn hat
plays the three-string guitar . . .
those lost dreams
sung into a new song

David He, China

fresh mowed lawn
this longing
for a land
I could not wait
to leave

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

advice from others
to count my blessings —
I make a list
shorter now than in the past
shorter still in years ahead

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

because I'm told
the stars are out of reach
I forage
roadside ditches to fill
my boxed-in needs

Louisa Howerow, Canada

on the road ahead
potholes and loose gravel
what would life be
if it were
a hurdle-free ride?

Priti Aisola, India (EC)

in this parched landscape
my windshield is clear
of bugs
how I hanker for rain
and the humble mosquito

Cynthia Rowe, Australia

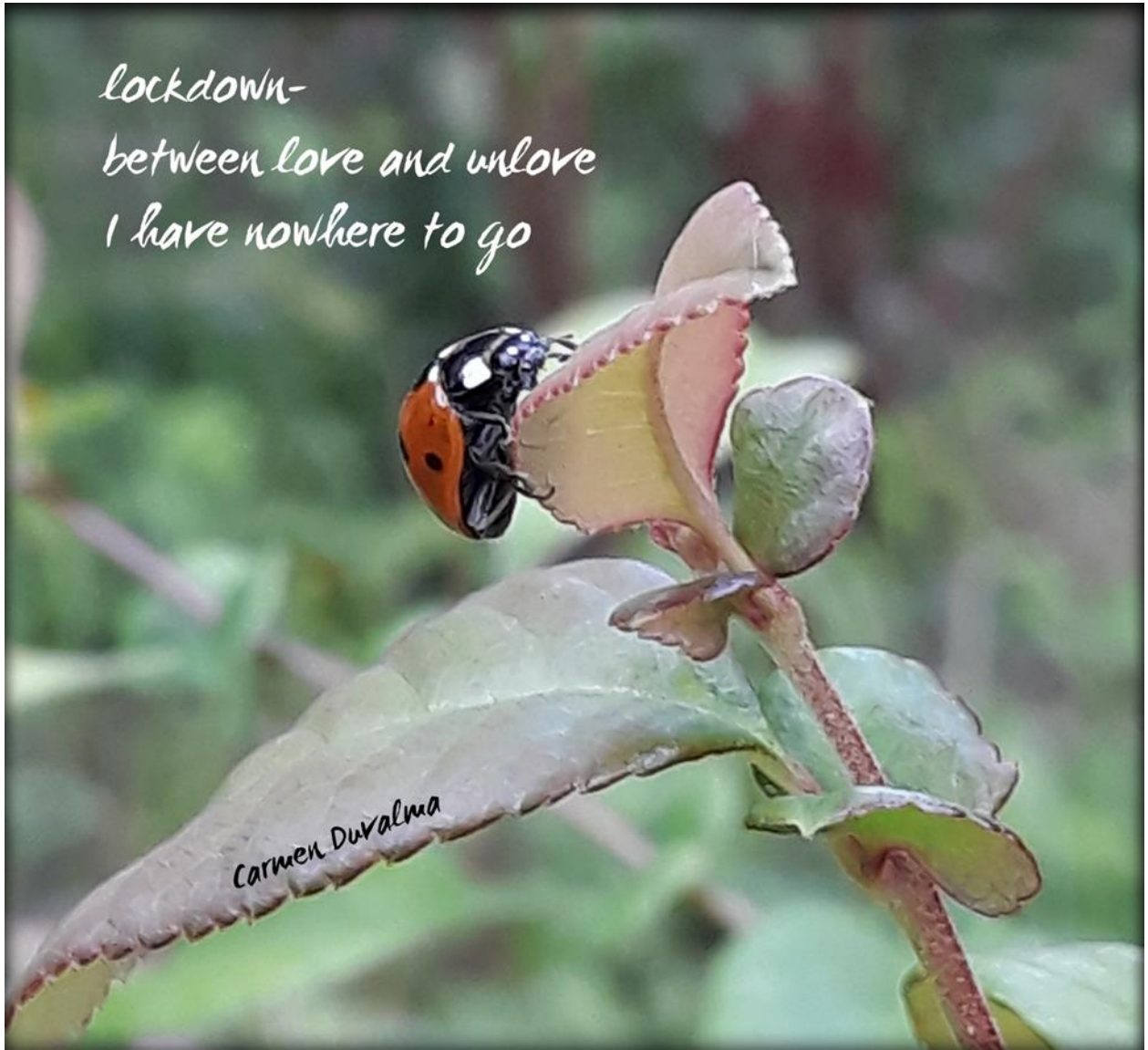
mosquitoes we killed
in the forest
mosquitoes we didn't
what else
should we remember

LeRoy Gorman, Canada (EC)

by and by
I promise to tell you
everything
but for now, let us listen . . .
nature is speaking

Debbie Strange, Canada (EC)

*lockdown-
between love and unlove
I have nowhere to go*

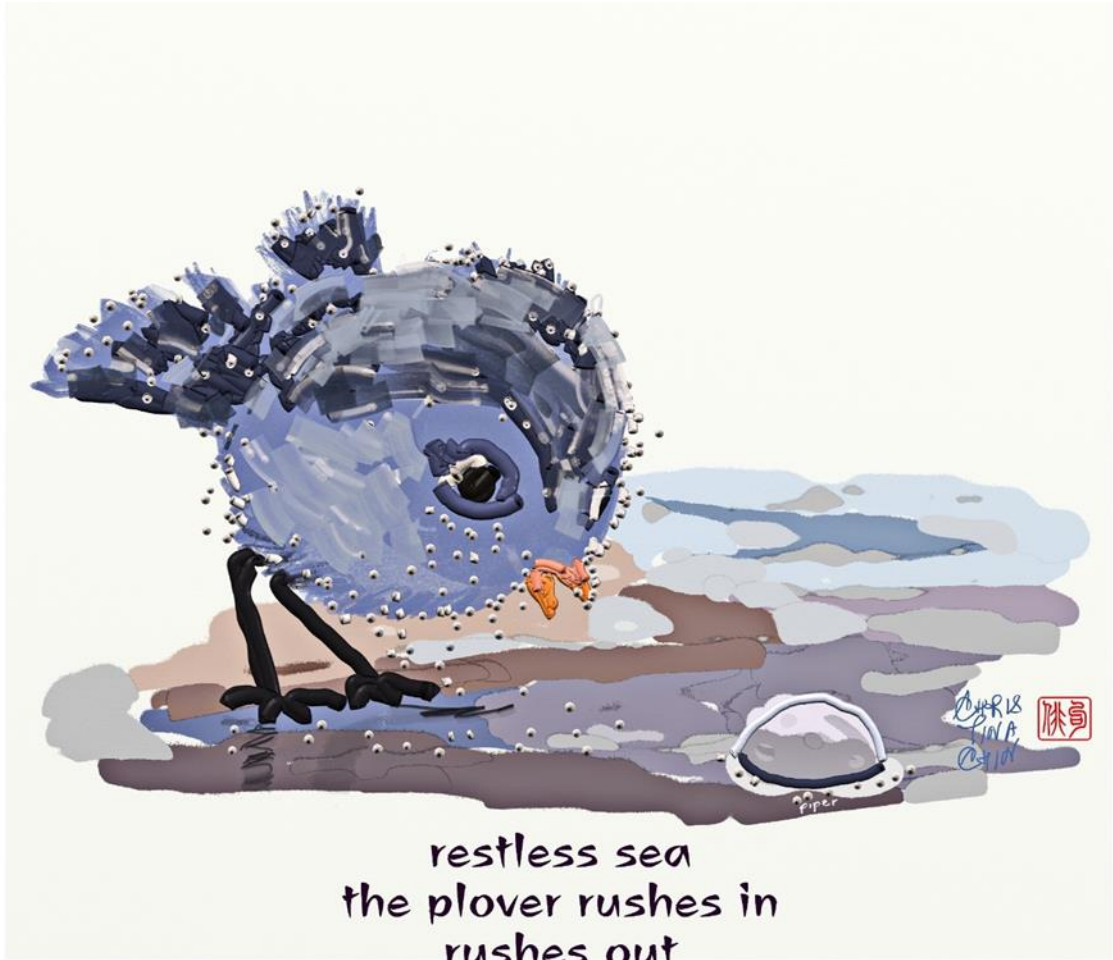


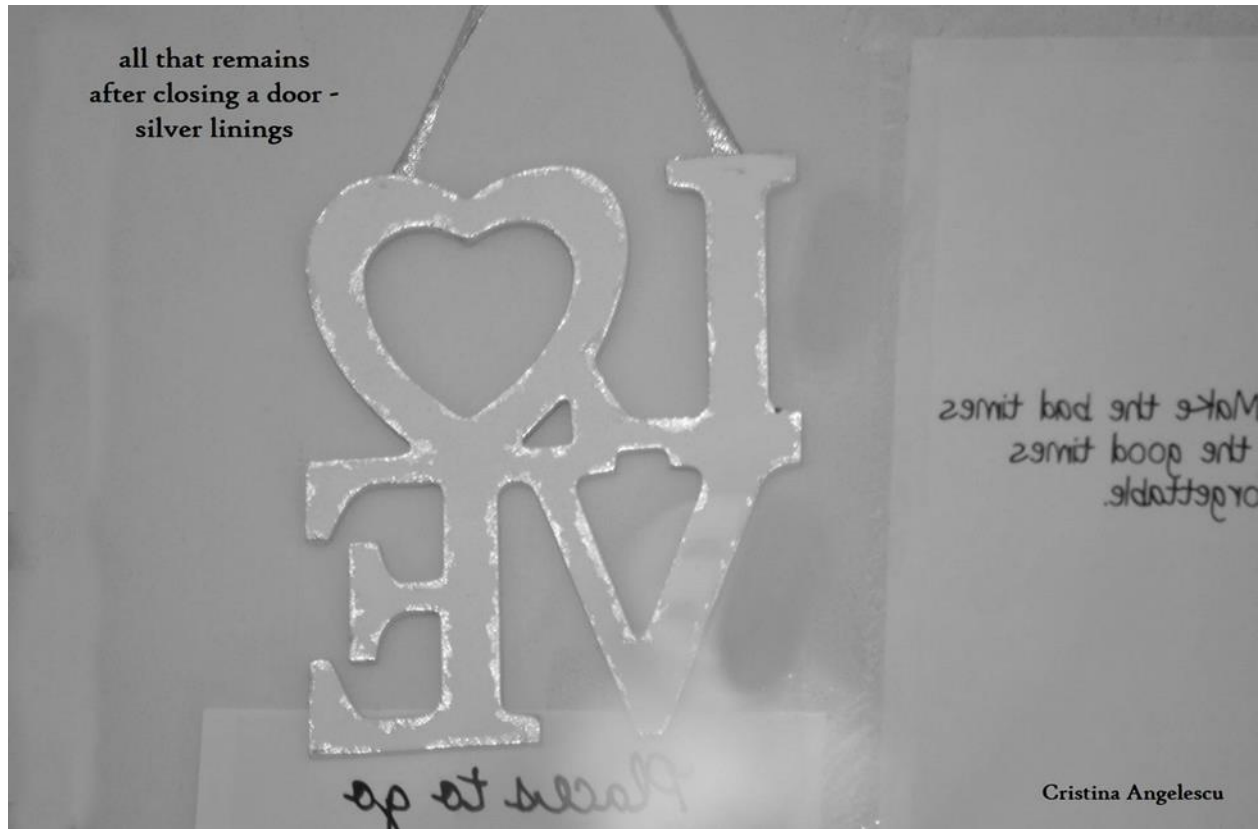
Carmen Divalma



*under grandma's shawl
bonding brothers
from other mothers*

carol raisfeld ~ photo: avopix







風
追
い
人

yesteryear
the speed of cherry blossoms
fall

it's hard
not to eavesdrop
 small creatures
outside my window
converse without me

Janet Lynn Davis, USA

here it is
this quiet room
inside me
where I sit waiting
for the crow to call

Joanna Ashwell, UK

saguaro spirits haunt
their blasted burial ground
what ever happened
to the wall between
sacred and profane

Autumn Noelle Hall, USA

the silence
of white crosses
lining the border
in the shadows
of freedom

Don Miller, USA

empty now
after scattering
his ashes
I return a shell
back to the sea

Bryan Rickert, USA

when I die
move on but not
too quickly
look back
but not for long

Marilyn Fleming, USA

it's not that
I write these
sad thoughts,
they wake me at night
and beg me to listen

Gregory Longenecker, USA

twigs scratch
against the window pane
like tiny hands
they bid me open
to the sound of starlight

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

his first kiss
like sprinkles of rain
from a cloudless sky
promises
that never happen

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

I close the blinds
on the afternoon sun,
the years of dust . . .
all the ways we've learned
to leave things alone

James Chessing, USA

my notebook
of unfinished poems
just waiting
for a breath of fresh air
and the chance to change

Cyndi Lloyd, USA

now I bear ink stains
upon my palm . . .
the lingering weight
of a letter
not yet written

Praniti Gulyani, India

distant thunder —
I lay down my pen
to listen
for the rain's soft voice
and the crying of the wind

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

the chiming clock
begins to wind down . . .
five months of quarantine
yet still the roses bloom
and red birds sing

Mary Kendall, USA

Editor's Choices (EC)

As the new tanka editor for *cattails*, I want to thank those who've come before me — an'ya, David Terelinck, and Kathy Kituai. Your love of poetry, along with your tanka sensibilities and many hours of time, are appreciated. I can only try to fill the footprints you've left behind.

All editors have opinions and, not surprisingly, they can be very different! My personal preferences will no doubt become evident as you read my selections for this and future issues of the journal. Alongside my own likes and dislikes, there are other things to consider. I hope to publish a variety of styles, themes and emotions, from both men and women, as well as from emerging and seasoned poets from around the world. Of course, whether I can do this depends on the submissions I receive for each individual issue.

Although I'd like to publish ALL the tanka on my initial shortlists, I need to whittle down some 600 submitted poems to a mere 50 for publication. This is always difficult, as is informing both novice and experienced writers that I'm unable to publish one of their tanka for the upcoming issue. It may be that several tanka are somewhat similar in several ways and two such verses may be 'enough'. If none are accepted, please don't think of it as a rejection. It may be that it just hasn't found its best home yet. Send it out again . . . and again, if necessary. And even once again. Ask me or others for suggestions and opinions, but don't change something just to make someone else happy. It's your poem and you have the final say concerning what works for you.

As for what influences my choices, you should know that I tend to interpret tanka literally before looking for metaphorical possibilities. The word tanka means 'short song' so I prefer tanka that display some musicality via sounds (consonance and assonance, for instance), phrasing, and rhythm. I also find that two-part tanka are more likely to appeal to me. Too much of a good thing, however, can become boring, so please submit some of your favourite tanka and win me over to another style of writing!

I look forward to reading your submissions, as well as getting to know you through our shared correspondence.

Susan Constable



on the road ahead
potholes and loose gravel
what would life be
if it were
a hurdle-free ride?

This tanka by Priti Aisola in India captured my interest on first reading and stayed with me throughout the selection process. When it came time to identify my Editor's Choice tanka, I found the imagery and direct question still gave me a lot to think about.

I'm sure we've all travelled the literal road in this opening couplet. Perhaps we start on smooth pavement, but somewhere along the way, the situation changes and we discover potholes and loose gravel which make our trip less enjoyable. We have to be more careful and keep our eyes open in case conditions get worse.

Lines 4-5 turn from literal to metaphorical. Sometimes questions don't work well for me in tanka, but that's usually because the question allows for a yes or no answer. After I've mentally answered the question, the tanka closes down. In this case, however, the question asks me to engage with the poem, to imagine what it would be like if life came without any ups and downs, detours, and difficult situations. Not only that, but what kind of person would I be if I never had to face such challenges or to learn from experience?

As well as appreciating the sentiment of this tanka, I also notice the effective use of alliteration (what/would/were), the consonance (gravel/life/hurdle) and the rhythm as I read this aloud. Each line has a natural pause at the end and, even without punctuation, the meaning remains clear on first reading.

Thank you, Priti, for sharing your tanka with *cattail* readers.



mosquitoes we killed
in the forest
mosquitoes we didn't
what else
should we remember

The first time I read this tanka by LeRoy Gorman of Canada, I couldn't help but chuckle. It's

definitely not an Issa poem, but for anyone who's been caught in a cloud of mosquitoes, it's certainly relatable! The repetition of 'mosquitoes' fits the tanka's message: these annoying little critters are everywhere. We can kill some of them, but never all of them.

There's life and there's death, yet the question in the closing couplet suggests there's even more to consider. The narrator of the poem is noticing the little things, but surely there's something more important to think about. I'm led to think we often (as the saying goes) can't see the forest for the trees. Rather than focusing on all the petty annoyances in our life, maybe we should look at the deeper issues . . . the ones that really matter.

Technically, I find the parallel structure to be effective, as well as the consonance and alliteration of M's and R's. The lack of punctuation also works for me since line 4 suggests a question is in the making.

~~~~~

by and by  
I promise to tell you  
everything  
but for now, let us listen . . .  
nature is speaking

It's strictly coincidence that two of my Editor's Choice selections are written by Canadians. This one, by Debbie Strange, drew me in with its musical 'by and by' followed by a hint that she might be ready to share a secret. Who can resist reading further?

Each line is a coherent thought or phrase and slips easily into the following line without confusion. The form is fairly traditional, with its s/l/s/l/l sound and appearance on the page . . . and that works well for me. I also like the human element combined with nature.

The change of direction when we arrive at the mid-line comma works well. We discover we're not going to hear 'everything'; instead, we have to listen. I doubt that readers will expect what's to come in line 5, but what a delightful surprise with which to conclude this engaging tanka.

I suspect some people would say punctuation is not needed. Technically, maybe it isn't. However, I find the comma and ellipsis slow me down, give me time to be still, become calm, and to open my ears and really listen.



As I began sequencing the tanka for this edition of *cattails*, I was shuffling poems around on my desk and by sheer coincidence, Debbie's tanka appeared below LeRoy's.

mosquitoes we killed  
in the forest  
mosquitoes we didn't  
what else  
should we remember

by and by  
I promise to tell you  
everything  
but for now, let us listen . . .  
nature is speaking

Suddenly there was an answer to his question! What's more, I love the way these two tanka fit together like the proverbial hand and glove. They both include effective alliteration and a lyrical rhythm. I can't help but notice the identical beat in 'mosquitoes we didn't' and 'I promise to tell you', as well as in the tanka's fifth lines, 'should we remember' and 'nature is speaking.' Hearing mosquitoes speak on behalf of nature just adds to this delightful and accidental pairing.

Thank you, Debbie and LeRoy, for penning these tanka and submitting them to *cattails*.

Susan Constable



# Haibun



Malachite Butterfly (*Siproeta stelenes*) - Costa Rica

## Time-lapse

Nadejda Kostadinova, Bulgaria

This is my favorite baby photo. Small, vintage style, black and white with wavy edges. My sister is holding me high in the air and I am laughing. She is looking at me and also laughing. The thin fluff of my hair is flying.

soft clouds  
how far can  
dreams go

## Small Talk

Joan Prefontaine, USA

In junior high, I speculated that every encounter could become meaningful if it didn't involve small talk. "Chit-chat is pointless," I complain to my dad one idle afternoon, "and I don't see why I have to use it for so many stupid social occasions." My dad looks up from grading exams with faint amusement. "Small talk is the lubricant that makes real conversation possible," he murmurs, returning quickly to his work. At the time I dismissed his opinion as being predictably conformist, but lately, whenever someone makes an offhand remark to me, usually regarding what a perfect or wretched day it is weather-wise, I find myself replying in kind.

from one flower  
to the next  
busy-bee morning

## **A Certain Music**

Ashish Narain, Philippines

In 1974, my father took up a job in Muzaffarnagar, a very small place, more village than town. His position came with a big house and an acre of field. The soil was fertile, so mother decided to plant okra. Under her watchful eye and with the blessing of the weather gods, it was a bumper harvest. They sold so much okra that prices crashed in the local market. Nonetheless, by the end of the season, my parents had collected a bagful of coins. They took it to the city and returned with our first record player.

golden oldies —  
a time when  
they were not

## Fading Away

Wendy Toth Notarnicola, USA

Her gown rides up and I trace the faint, white scar on her leg with my finger. I remember the day she got it — we were climbing a chain link fence and she slipped and cut herself on the twisted wires at the top. When the deep wound healed, she was left with a thick, white scar four inches long. In the summer, her skin would tan as we played in the sun, but the scar stayed milky white. At first, she was proud of the scar - it was her tomboy's badge of honor. But as she grew older, she kept hoping it would fade so she could wear short skirts without feeling self-conscious.

Now, so many years later, the scar has finally faded until it's barely visible. She got her wish, but too late. I pull her gown back down over her legs as the hospice nurse comes to check on her.

cloudwatching  
vapor trails dissipate  
in the summer sky

## Drifting

Gavin Austin, Australia

Your face haunts me, even now as you smile — dark eyes shining. How I prayed that morning would not arrive to take you from me. Goodbye . . . such an impotent word. I write you messages filled with words pretty and fragile as painted teacups. All carefully chosen as I strive to tell you everything, yet say little. Smiling back at you, I return you to the embrace of folded leather; restore you to my back pocket.

shadows deepen  
the cavern you left...  
sea-worn rock

**dissolution**

Gregory Longenecker, USA

death is not as dumb as he looks  
not that he and I are well-acquainted  
but I have gotten up there in age  
though you and I aren't close enough  
for you to know it

still

I'm of an age that the kids  
don't say hello out of fear  
that they'll catch it whatever it is I have  
thinning hair, hemorrhoids, bad teeth

or

maybe they think I'll drop dead  
and then what will they do apologize  
to my wife to their mothers  
but I think maybe I look like death

to them whatever

he looks like

gray skies

it shuffles past kids

playing hopscotch

## Head Fits

Beate Conrad, Germany

A small chamber. An unmade bed.  
Fingers snap. Two times.  
Lasting silence.

Flickers on the wall. In its corner a table and a chair.

Fingers click. Again. A-rhythmic

letters  
without knowing  
their dimension

fading to the center of the chamber white above the bed a clothesline. On it, sharp and bowed, the shade of a head.

A whistle cuts through the room a shadow of scissors dangling from the line already grown the head's silhouette. Cut. Open the skull's a lid of a hat-box

just before dawn  
the cold shadows returned  
where they belong



**The old man who doesn't know who he is**

Tim Gardiner, UK (EC)

eight fifteen basement documents pika don floor dust screams above ruins crawl black  
smoke night fall half-moon skeletal dome baby cry naked man fire water spout gums  
bleed silhouette

shadow girl jumping cloud shadow

*In memory of Eizo Nomura (1898-1982), the nearest survivor (170 m) to the hypocenter of  
Hiroshima atomic bomb*

**September 4, 1942**

Susan Beth Furst, USA

*“Only yesterday I ordered the registration of nine-year-old children. I wanted to save at least one year – children from nine to ten. But they (the Nazis) would not yield. I succeeded in one thing – to save the children over ten.”*

wailing in Ramah  
because they are  
no more

*Rumkowski’s Address at the Time of the Deportation of the Children from the Lodz Ghetto,  
September 4, 1942.*

*Chaim Mordechai Rumkowski, Judenrat Chairman, Lodz Ghetto.*

Shoah Resource Center [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

## Time Bomb

Tom Staudt, Australia

According to the latest research, the picture is very bleak indeed.

Last week alone we lost six hundred and nine. That's eighty-seven every single day, like the Great hopping mouse, which most people probably never heard about and many other species we already lost.

If we carry on like this it will most certainly affect us all, sooner rather than later.

At the same time, we were adding around three hundred fifty thousand new souls each day.

Even the most sceptical critics have to acknowledge that this is untenable and understand the gravity of the situation.

We are in the midst of a new and devastating mass extinction event.

growing blackness  
a blue sphere struggles  
for survival

## **We're Human, All Too Human**

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

house party  
a drunk man stumbles over  
his words, *just a flu*

"I know many are tired of hearing me say that Covid-19 is not over. Sometimes I'm tired of saying it," the chief medical officer responds to a reporter's question about a possible outbreak. "The truth is though that Covid-19 is still here." The graying and silver strands in his hair are more visible at today's briefing.

TV off and lights out . . .  
what's left of quarantine life  
this skylight

## **We Have Met the Enemy and It Is Us**

Dian Duchin Reed, USA

We split our time between here and the rest of the world, *pieds à terre* everywhere as if our feet were weeds and our needs were legion.

And closets . . . don't even ask how many shoes we have, how high or low, with or without bows, buckles, leather, scales.

If feathered hats were still the rage, every egret would regret it, likewise beaver, mink, and ermine on the eve of the next big freeze.

Same day delivery — no problem. No problem?

buying into  
hunting and gathering  
no returns accepted

## Strata

Cyndi Lloyd, U.S.A.

the Great Wall  
stone by stone  
layers of time

I stand on one of the world's longest structures (over 13,000 miles), built on the backs of farmers, prisoners, and soldiers, who used local materials — bricks crushed from granite, limestone, marble, and shale and then reinforced with lime mortar and sticky rice juice. Sand-covered branches from bulrushes, poplars, and red willows shore up the wall in other areas. Across the miles, the barrier also contains the bodies of deceased builders.

The uneven steps fatigue my legs — old steps meant to trip enemies' horses if the walls were breached. Even though undulating mountains surround the wall, this isn't a place to escape to Nature. Smog hangs in the distance. Hikers must wend their way through vendors selling colorful wares.

What would the soldiers, who once guarded this boundary from northern armies make of this invasion of visitors? Would they understand why some sections no longer have a wall — the bricks removed during the Cultural Revolution to build houses, farms, and reservoirs?

smoke columns  
from a coal power plant  
cranes take flight

## Does Time Stop After Wildfires

Scott Hicks, USA (EC)

Haze bronzes the morning sky. The hills are barren, but swelling for a fresh start. Sadness remains like old barbed wire fence posts along the two miles of asphalt snaking through granite mounds once shaded by oaks and sycamores; sun on the cooler side of noon. One house spared; in a swale another's river-rock chimney.

shades of new grass and poppies  
on a lone perch  
the mockingbird calls

## Leaving Town

John Budan, USA

Nothing much happens in Willacoochee. Boys hang out at the pool hall shooting snooker and all-day church on Sunday. I want to be pretty like Mabel Lee and dance and be in the movies. I don't want to work in the cotton fields or for a rich lady who yells all the time. As soon as I'm old enough, I'm going to hop on a Greyhound Bus and go as far north as i can.

sizzling heat  
the curved backs  
of harvest



## Panic Buying

Allyson Whipple, USA

I got scared away from shopping at HEB when I ran in for half a dozen jalapenos and a ball of queso Oaxaca the day that all the colleges decided to go online for the rest of the semester. A woman in the produce section was shoving all the tomatoes and all the jalapenos into one bag and not saving any for anyone else. What was she going to make? Even salsa doesn't keep forever. The checkout line stretched all the way to the back of the store, and I capitulated on my principles and used the self-checkout because I wasn't about to wait for an hour just for a little produce and cheese. As I scanned and paid for my items, two HEB employees were talking to a belligerent old white woman who had filled an entire shopping cart with bottled water. They were trying to explain the two-per-person limit, and she kept swearing she needed them to make an exception for her. Once I was free, I walked across the shopping center parking lot to JuiceLand to get a smoothie. A couple approached me; she said she lived here, and her boyfriend was from Dallas, and he'd stopped at every store he could find between here and there, but couldn't get any toilet paper, and most of the groceries were depleted. They asked me if I knew where they might find some toilet paper. My HEB had already been out for three days. I suggested they try gas stations; that's the only place I'd been able to resupply all week. They asked if I thought it was worth it to go into HEB. I told them to run in, grab 10 items, whatever essentials they could find, use the self-checkout, and get out of there. Then, in a moment of trust, I offered to let them follow me to my house half a mile away, and I would give them pasta and a few other pantry samples. Even though I was terrified of the panic buying, fearful that soon I wouldn't be able to get what I needed, I knew in that moment, I had enough. They declined, but the guy said, "Nobody in Dallas would offer to just give you food." But they were just as scared as I was, probably even more so. And if the world was ending, it made sense to take care of one another. I wonder what's become of them and their long-distance love in this pandemic. I hope they are okay. I hope they have food. I hope they were able to quarantine together rather than endure months of separation. I hope the trials of this time have not cracked the foundation of their relationship. I hope, in spite of everything, they are okay.

we plant a garden  
tilling soil against  
uncertainty

## Salsa Mania on a Galapagos Cruise

Ray Rasmussen, Canada

Male menopause, usually a guy's mid-life crisis, but mine is a late-life crisis. Just last week, I was seriously considering buying a red Ferrari California TX243 convertible, or paying money to jump off a cliff strapped into a hang glider that resembles the wings of a red-tailed hawk, or maybe even attending the Burning Man fete in the Black Rock desert of Nevada wearing a red loin cloth, a necklace of bear's teeth, and dropping ecstasy to help with the dancing.

Instead, I settle for Salsa lessons: affordable, not too dangerous, and unlikely to take me on the journey of no return (for which I'm not quite ready). As a bonus, I can wear the red vest gifted me by my partner.

Salsa, taste the word, Saal saaah! It's a Sassy dance with Cuban roots, a country with stunning beaches, spicy food and sizzling dance venues. Salsa the dance – far better than the tomato guacamole dip eaten with chips. This salsa takes weight off.

What possible interest could geriatric types with lower back, knee and hip problems, unpredictable incontinence and heart palpitations have in an active dance like Salsa? It is painful, I admit, watching trim, curvy women and muscle-toned men moving sensuously in what amounts to a mating dance. Worse, trying to move like them could catapult a geezer into cardiac arrest. From there it's a short jump into the cloudy place and I'm pretty sure Salsa dancing isn't allowed up there . . . at least not if the Puritans are in control.

So, my partner and I sneak into a dark corner on the ship's dance floor where all eyes are riveted on the young men and women showing off their skills, where no one pays attention to us unless we get in the way.

observation deck –  
the waddle of penguins  
on shore

## Gauging the Weather

Ulrike Narwani, Canada

Over breakfast, my 96-year old mother and I scan the bright, cold prairie sky. Watch trees bend with the wind. We keep track of the sun as it moves from left to right across the wide windows of her apartment. Late morning, we walk along the pathway overlooking the slow curve of the North Saskatchewan River. Benches line the path, each bearing a plaque dedicated to the memory of a beloved family member. In the afternoon, as we drink tea, she tells me about her childhood in Latvia. How she had always been fearless. Had climbed onto the roof of their house to rescue chicks. (Couldn't quite remember how they got there.) And about the time, during the Russian assaults, she had jumped out of a ditch to surprise her father, a forester, who was returning home on horseback. He pulled his gun, almost shot her. In the evening, we watch as a billowing darkness fills the sky, embers of light firing inside. Enthralled, my mother points, exclaims: I love clouds!

At night rain thunders down.

early morning mist . . .  
only the wing-beat of geese  
low over water

## Ritual

Neha R. Krishna, India

waiting to meet his dad, he paints flowers. he has painted many flowers in his school notebooks. his teacher punishes him sometimes but more often gives him a warning. sometimes, even the white clouds bear the shapes of flowers.

the stars sit against the black sheet listening to the numbers that have been weighed on the tip of every finger of his little hands. he counts days, math is not his favorite subject, but still, he counts. like every sunday, today, with his mother and all the flowers, when he pays a visit to where his father now lives.

broken headstones  
in the cemetery  
a few facing the sky

## Unforgettable

Elaine Wilburt, USA

At the reception as Natalie Cole began to sing a duet with her late father using the magic of digital remastering, Dad asked, “Don’t you want to dance with your husband? Your brother?”

“No, Dad, with you.”

For years, he always joked that the dance floor became the biggest space in the world. But then at my brother-in-law’s wedding, Dad claimed me to dance again to what he called “our song.”

Now every March, a new anniversary.

still  
in light and shadow  
half-moon

## Mis-Shapes

Joanna Ashwell, UK

The smell of chocolate is intoxicating. It enfolds you in a cocoon of bliss. There's something about visiting a chocolatier and observing the art of making chocolate. The finely packaged shapes, the rows and rows of delicacies to choose from. You can taste the difference. Exquisite centres and a smooth velvety texture to entice you. So why is it after choosing the finest blends, I'm also drawn to the imperfect, didn't make it chocolates? Picking a bag of mis-shapes, a random selection finds a way into my basket.

the childhood swings  
never quite enough  
to touch the cloud

## Treasure

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

Today's walk takes me along the granite escarpment not far from our house. It is peaceful and uncrowded. Lockdown is another place, another time. Hazy blue eucalypts extend into the valley and westward. Beside the trail there are many flowers if you take the time to look. Tiny yellow daisies, white flannel flowers, and creamy orchids among tall grass clumps amongst tree trunks. Beside a large rocky outcrop I stop to rest and take in the vista. To my delight I find a stand of six spiky leaf flowering *Lambertia Formosa*, woody bearded twin horn seedpods pointing skyward. My child self-picks and bites through the tuft of the flower . . .

mountain devil . . .

red petal clusters

hide bountiful honey

*Lambertia Formosa* common name is Mountain Devil

## Portraits

Gail Oare, USA

Before photography, family faces were preserved in portrait paintings. Slow-drying oils layered by artisans trying to make a living. A prolific artist intent on making a living would use a template to pre-paint generic bodies on canvases and later customize one of them with a client's face during an abbreviated sitting. I can envision the assembly line of the artist's studio: Rows of headless shirtwaists and short pants propped up on easels, like the newest fashions hanging from department store racks, headless mannequins in the window. Jars of murky liquid resting on splattered shelves, residue dissolving from paint brushes after a good day's work. And the gradual shift of evening shadows along the row of persons-in-progress patiently awaiting their identities.

shards of blue shells  
young necks stretching  
for the worm

This process often resulted in disproportions in composition: adult-sized heads placed atop the lacy collars of small-boned children with plump baby hands clasped innocently in their laps. Incongruences that a mother and father wouldn't even see when receiving the finished portrait of their cherished son or daughter captured briefly in the smooth brushstrokes of youth.

full moon  
in a cloudless sky  
the blush of a first apple



## Binary Star

Amelia Cotter, USA

The first and only time I saw a ghost was when I was 11 years old and exploring an abandoned house in Monkton, Maryland, close to where I grew up. I had developed an affinity for this house and spent a lot of time imagining who might have lived there, what their lives were like, and of course, if they were haunting it.

Local legend had it that the place was haunted by a ghost named “Walter” and the house was affectionately called, “Walter’s House.” I would walk through the safe parts of the house and wish that I could see this ghost just once.

One day, as I was leaving, I looked up into the attic windows. Leaning out of one of them and looking down at me was a boy or young man with his hands on the windowsill, wearing what looked like an old-fashioned shirt that gathered at the cuffs and pants with suspenders. His body and clothing were completely white, and he had no face, but I could see the folds in his clothing and sensed that his expression, directed at me, was one of curiosity. A sensation of static electricity covered my entire body.

Somehow, I wasn’t afraid. I looked up at him, transfixed, certain that he knew how much I just wanted to make a connection. I was an awkward suburban adolescent, filled with a sense of adventure and longing beyond my understanding. I’ve spent many more years searching for ghosts, and adventure, in places around the world, and I’ve found that the moments of wonder almost never live in the answers, but in the questions.

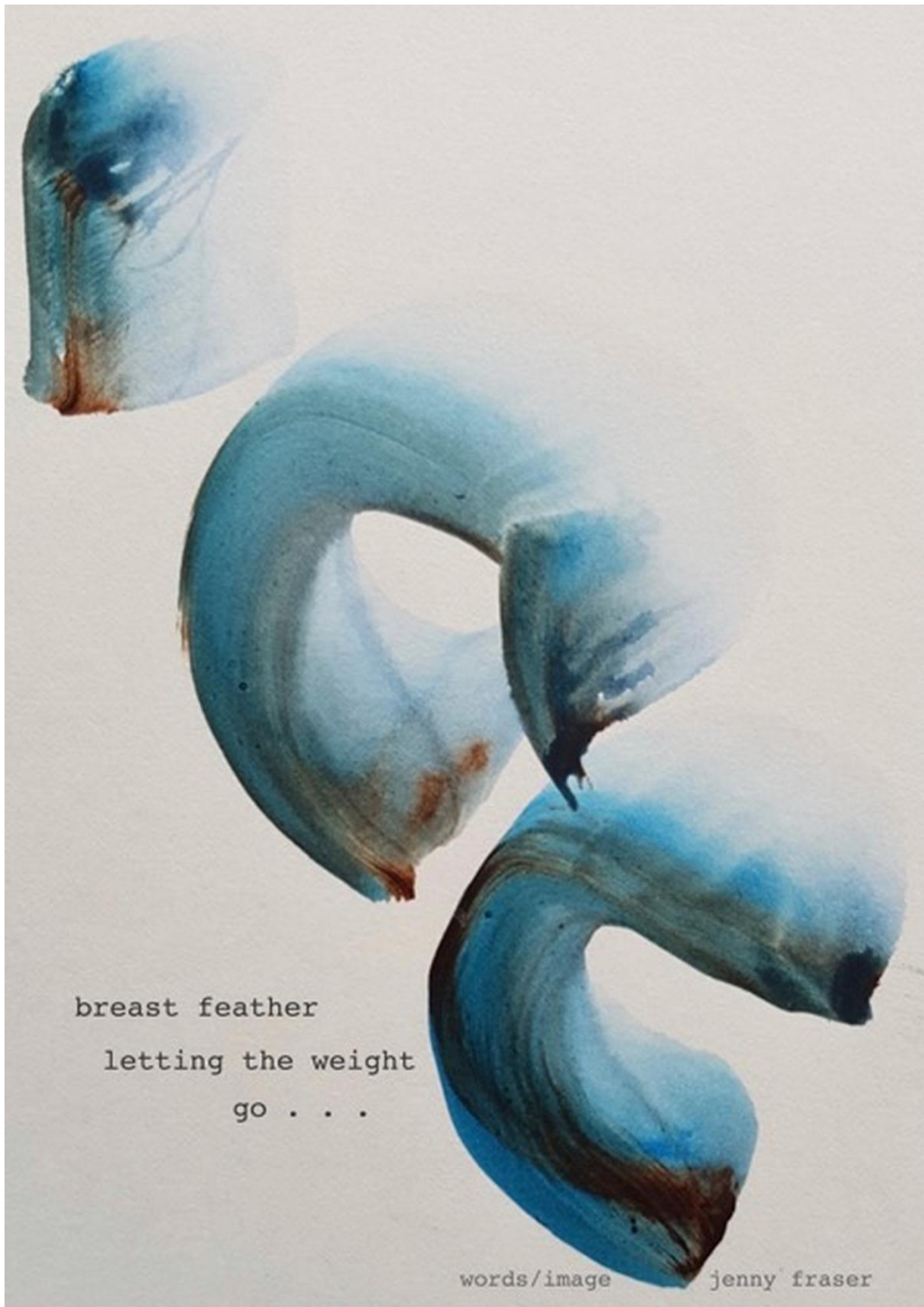
cloud mirage over the lake  
someday  
our affair

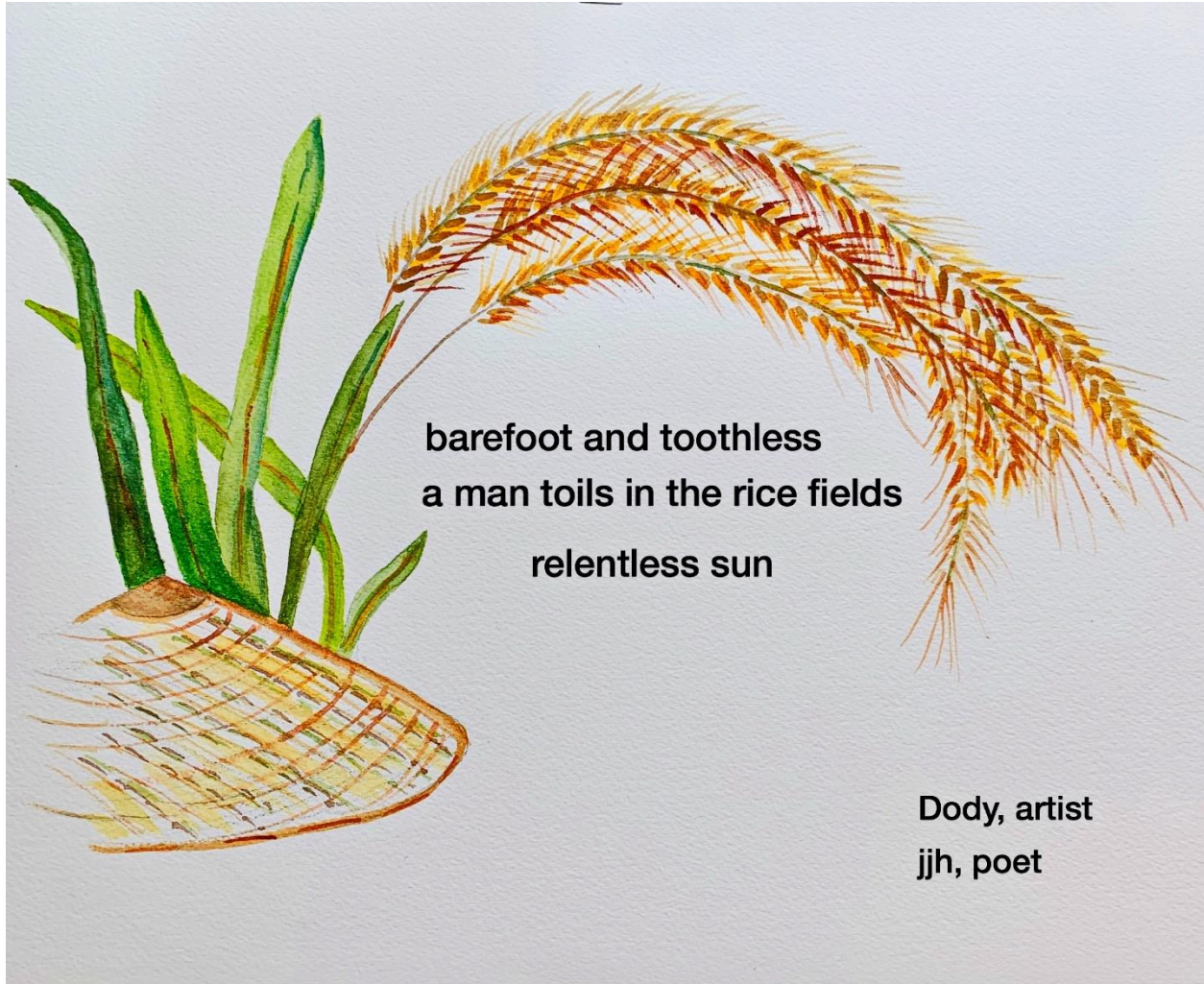
## Nuages

Lew Watts, USA

That night was the low point. Since then I've tried to make sense of the whole thing. There was jealousy, of course. But who can fight the acrid fog of humiliation? And it had been such a lovely evening, sitting beside the stage. That was until he walked up, asking to borrow her, "for quick a blow," he said. When he returned, I couldn't look at him, nor at her, though he had played beautifully. But why did he have to choose that Django number we'd struggled with all those years? I tried to give her one last chance when I got home. But no, she just couldn't bring herself to play for me like she played for him. That's when the senseless mist descended. I heard a sickening crack somewhere in the distance, and opened my eyes. She lay across the bed, broken. When I tried to place her back in the case she wouldn't fit. I had to give her a little twist before she slid down into the red felt. And there she now lies, night after night, her mother-of-pearl neck gleaming in moonlight, whiter than clouds.

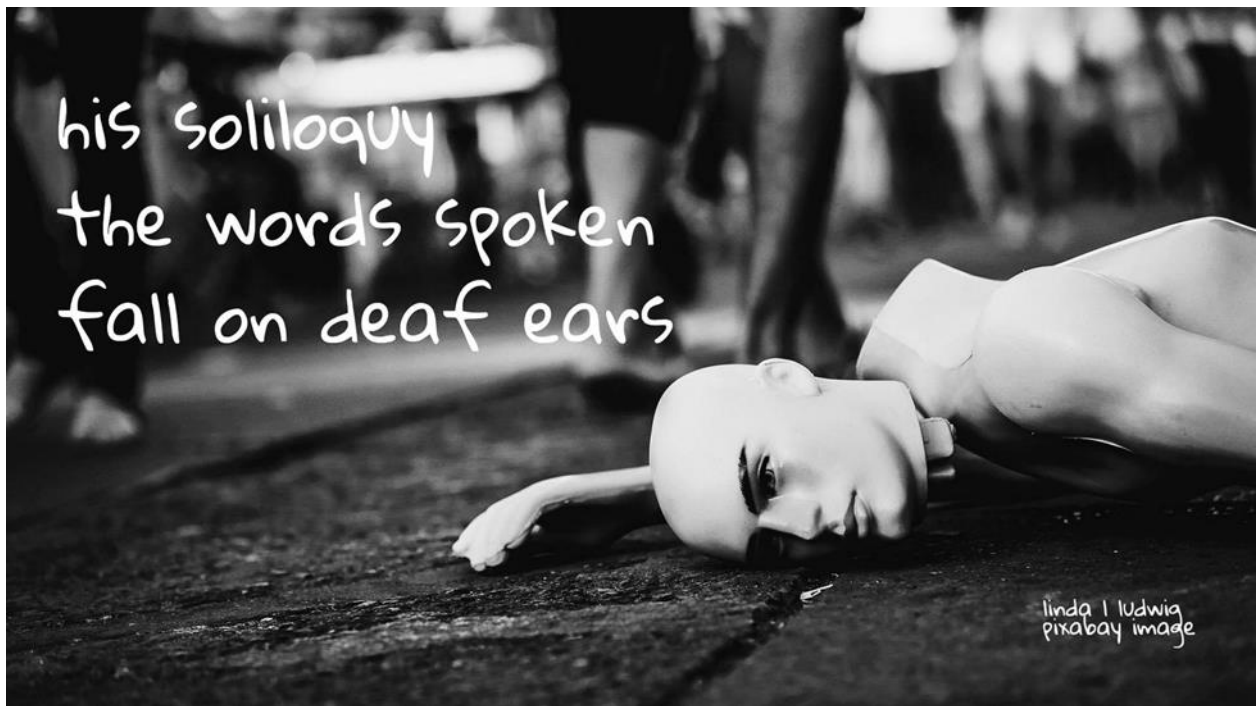
open casket  
another man's plectrum  
in the strings





**barefoot and toothless  
a man toils in the rice fields  
relentless sun**

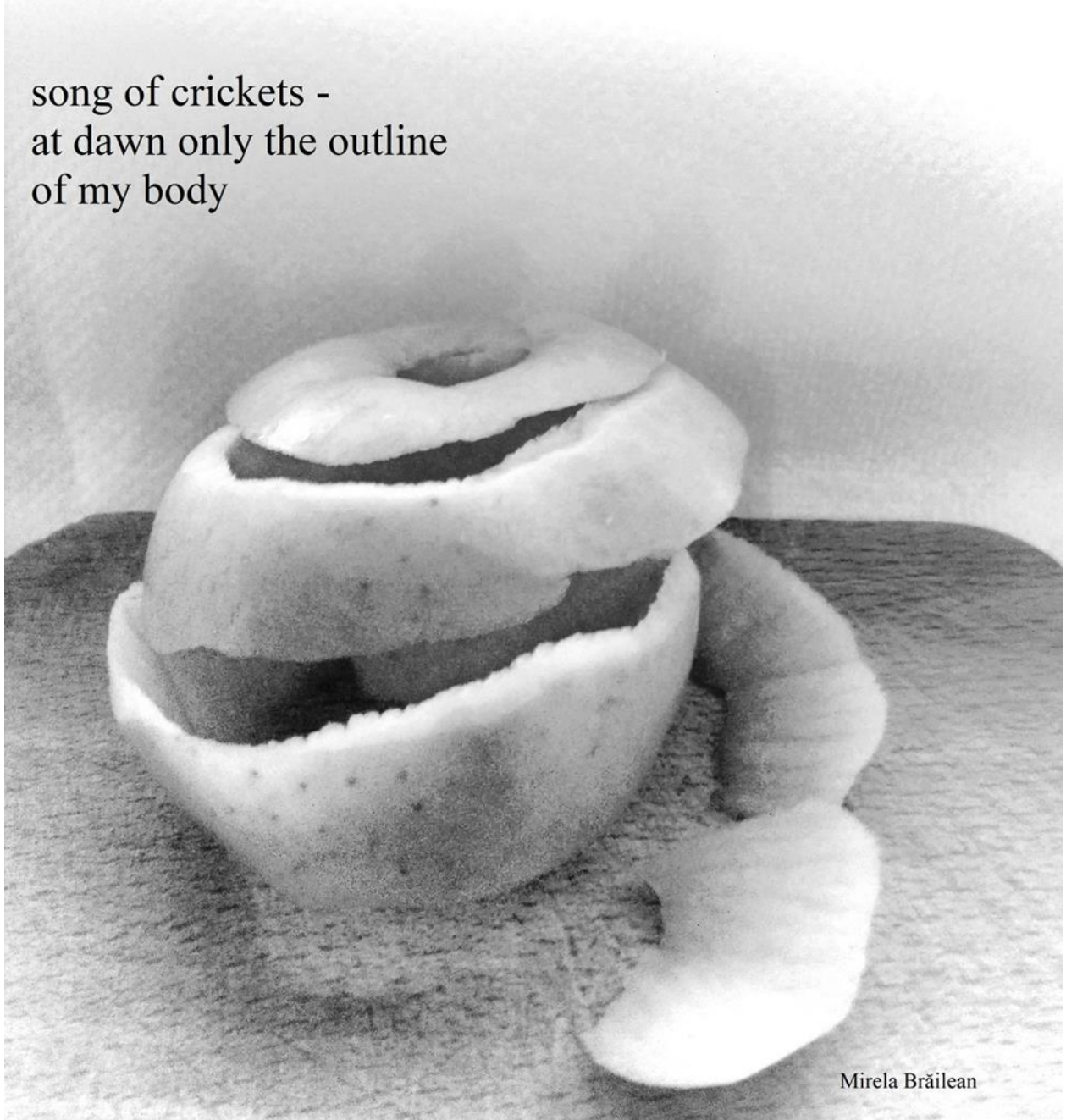
**Dody, artist  
jjh, poet**





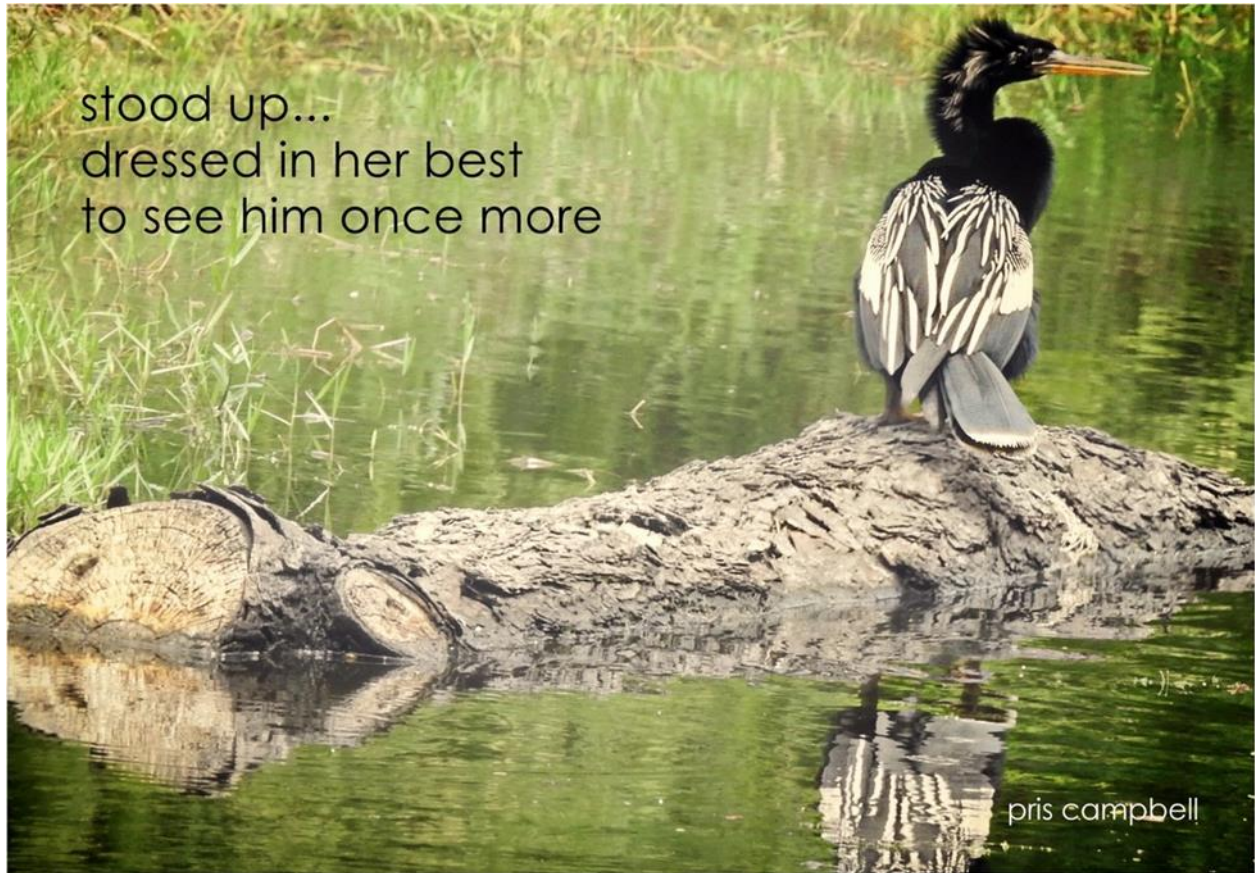


song of crickets -  
at dawn only the outline  
of my body



Mirela Brăilean







## Instruments

Ernest Wit, Poland

On a summer afternoon, you put on the Concerto for Horn and Orchestra by Mozart. We giggle and frolic about the wood, whistling and hooting in the clearings. You say that mum is happy, nothing hurts her anymore. I like the sound of your vocal cords. When you are silent, my eardrums burst. In the evening, the rain rustles.

lacrimosa  
the hammer and anvil  
in your ear

## Virtuality

John Hawkhead, UK

Day and night. Staring into the flickering screen. This boy, this boy-man, submerged in a virtual universe. Is he drowning or swimming? We have no idea — there are no signals we understand. While the sun circles us, throwing light and shadows through forests and oceans, he is locked in a box inside himself. What is he becoming? What will he become? What is the future . . . is there such a thing?

making sense of it  
the software code  
for shoot 'em up

**Contractor Beige**

Mike Montreuil, Canada

Is there such a thing as a good thing? No one wants to give me an answer.

Her smile would be a good thing. But, at this stage in my life, I wonder if I should believe?

Her fingers caressing my smiling lips. Would they make me continue until the end?

My arms wrapped around her, holding her close? The scent of her hair . . .

staring at four walls  
the paint  
not wanting to dry

## Drifting and Yet . . .

Janice Doppler, USA

He arrives ninety minutes late for our lunch date . . . just as I finish eating. It is our first conversation since he left ten, maybe twelve years ago upon winning a scholarship to a prestigious art school in the mid-west. He shares that he returned recently and found part-time work cleaning hotel rooms. It is “not working out” here so he is moving his belongings to his parent’s cottage on Boston’s south shore then flying to Spain . . . at ten o’clock tonight . . . on a one-way ticket. Or, he may skip Spain and stay at the summer-only cottage. It is January. Or, he may visit his father in Florida. He says he lives by doing what feels right in the moment. He smiles and declares he’ll know what to do after a few breaths of ocean air.

He downs his last spoonful of borscht, starts on a plate of apple slaw, and asks whether I am still writing. I nod. He listens to a haiku then stares into space without saying a word or moving a muscle for an uncomfortably long time. I don’t know what to do or say so I sit in silence until he says, “Beautiful! Please recite it again.” I do. He stares again. This time, he breaks the silence by reciting my haiku! He finishes his slaw and we leave the restaurant. He has a plane to catch . . . or not . . .

ice-covered pond  
a lone feather floats  
in an open space

## The Seagull

Hazel Hall, Australia

We're at the bus stop in town when a seagull hops onto the kerb. It checks out the scene, eyeballs me and skitters nearer. *Hello gull*, I say quietly. *You're a long way from home*. The bird skips up closer. I've saved a bit of my ice cream cone, but a loud woman walks up, plonks her body next to mine and shoos it away. I watch it retreat a little. Then my husband comes back from the shop and sits down silently in an empty seat near me. Slowly the gull zigzags forward and looks at him inquiringly. I hear him say something softly to the bird. But the bus trundles up and it flutters away. On the way home we discuss the seagull and the woman with the flapping hands. *It came in peace*, he says.

stretching  
over the wasteland  
makeshift tents

## Twenty-One Shots

Colleen M. Farrelly, USA

I don't drink, but this fits. I'm in the back of a dilapidated shack with the dive's denizens. He's late.

buzzing barfly  
life cut short  
by a bottle

He shows up, and we head to the back. He downs shots. I catch a contact high, loosening up enough to talk. He mentions a Bosnian deployment buddy who died in a brawl last month. I talk about another squadron suicide. The bar suddenly feels empty and exposed.

We end up at his place, barricaded and broken in each other's arms. The uncut cake sits in the corner, melting in the heat. A folded flag sits on the shelf above it, along with his brother's medals. Dawn breaks before we doze off.

icing melting  
under a candle —  
a teardrop brimming

## Battle Scars

Praniti Gulyani, India

After my third abortion, my being swells with the emptiness of what was, an awkward stance to accept what is. I yearn for the fullness of the life that once occupied my insides, the life that moistened the driest parts of my heart, the life that gave me life.

The night sky feels heavy, perhaps drooping under the weight of the waxing gibbous.

*Is the sky pregnant too?*

*Is the moon, but a survivor of the war within a womb?*

*Are the craters merely battle scars?*

the new shape  
of an old bruise  
. . . falling raindrops

## Grace Lost

Pris Campbell, USA

She dyed her hair black because he asked her, circled her eyes with mascara thick as a boxer's bruises like his mama's because he liked her that way. He petted, but never to third base since his mama taught him what not to do with good girls, flaunted Ann Margaret in her face after they married. When the baby came, he rarely wanted sex again because grown men didn't have sex with mama. When she flew into another man's arms he sang sad songs like 'maybe I didn't tell you', could never understand how she and mama both abandoned him, left him with his Cadillac buddies and groupies, hoped she would come running back, replaced her with manicured Barbies, hoping he could forget her, but exploded on his bathroom floor, mama — Priscilla always on his mind.

day moon  
the dog next door  
keeps howling



## Merino

Arvinder Kaur, India

Much before the onset of winter mother starts her knitting projects. There is going to be a new pullover for her older one while the younger one has asked for a pink one with cables. Grandpa wants a cap for his evening walks and Father is eagerly awaiting a cardigan in his favourite olive green with wooden buttons. She takes me to buy skeins of the different shades as well as knitting needles of various sizes and thickness. " I want to finish shopping for the entire winter just to save time. There is a lot of work at home," She worries all the time.

In the warm languid winter sun as everyone sits around platters of peanuts and jaggery mother brings out her knitting. Long coils of wool go around our knees and she quickly makes balls. Soon the patterns start emerging and she measures the knitting against the body of the person.

Years passed. We stopped asking for hand-knitted sweaters and instead bought foreign, fashionable brands. Mother's vision has now faded. Her gnarled hands tremble. She can hardly differentiate between colours and the mill-made sweaters have perfect cables.

long nights —  
the silence  
of her knitting needles

## Spring Cleaning

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

Hot water and vinegar sting my nose. She tells me to rub until the window squeaks. We put lemon wax on the mahogany furniture, polishing until it glows. Not because of company coming, but because it's her way. With the sun on her back she pulls the just washed curtains taut to fit the stretcher, moving from tack to tack.

the pulse of spring  
nimble fingers  
find a rhythm

## Saturday Ritual

Bryan Rickert, USA

Here's how it works. The old man is too proud to ask for help. Things always need to get done around the place. So, while I mow the yard, he starts a project we both know he can't finish. Today it is scraping and painting the old wooden barn doors. Grass mowed, tractor cleaned and put away, I pick up an old putty knife and start scraping. He doesn't need to ask and I don't need to be told.

late day sun  
a beer cooler full  
of stories

## Never keep a lady waiting

*Pitt Buerken, Germany*

We had an appointment at nine o'clock in the morning, but I didn't really feel like it — to be honest, I didn't feel like it at all — and I dawdled while I washed, combed and dressed. Therefore, I was a little late and came across an angry woman who told me that. I grouched away as if none of this was any of my business. I was nearly four and in my defiant phase. "Never keep a lady waiting," my mother said. A lady? I already knew ladies, those with high heels, fur coats, so fussy with red fingernails and pinned up hair. But this one was my mother! So, there was something to be made clear: "You are not a lady, you are my mother," I said with fervent conviction and not tolerating any contradiction.

That hit home. This woman was henceforth only my mother — still insisting on punctuality.

new kids  
vetust codes of conduct  
being redefined

## **The bird book**

**D.V.Rozic, Croatia**

From his desk I could see the trellis with some grapes. Several kinds of birds had stopped by for a bite. That afternoon, for the first time the guests were a couple of European turtle doves. The first bird carefully landed nearby a grape cluster, checked the vicinity before removing a grape. Then it flew back to its partner on a leafless cherry bough several yards away. The second bird arrived close to my window, took its fruit and they left the garden together.

my father's bird book —  
the riches of his solitude  
in handwritten notes

## Goldfish

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

One early spring morning my granddaughter and I went fishing by the nearby lake. We picked a place under a shady tree by the water.

I threw the fishing rod forward; the line ran out. While we were waiting for a fish to bite, we enjoyed the pancakes we brought with us. Suddenly the bobber started to go under. I pulled a fish out of water.

Surprisingly, it was a goldfish. I immediately proposed to my granddaughter to make a wish. She thought for a while and then said: "What if I fulfill the wish of this small fish? It wants to be free. Look, the poor fish is so impatient to swim in the lake again! Let's release it!"

And the wish came true.

early spring  
a cloud fish in the treetop  
of a flowering cherry

## Brooklyn Racer

Charlotte Mandel, USA

Salt air and the Brighton Beach boardwalk opens weekends for bicycle riding, with bike rental stations a mile apart. I'm eight years old and my brother, eighteen, shrugs, nods, consents to drive me with him and teach me to ride. He rents a low balloon-tire model, easiest for balance, lifts me to the seat, and I'm able to wheel along. He zips off on a speed Schwinn.

I'm doing a fine straight line when directly in front of me, a paunchy gray-haired man pumps varicose legs at lazy walking tempo. I don't know how to curve past him, or brake. Another minute and we'll crash! My solution: lean left, fall, badly bruise elbow, knee and cheek.

ocean in whitecap  
abandoned on the boardwalk  
a child's bike

## Balancing Act

Gautam Nadkarni, India

My friend Dinesh is an honest to goodness intellectual. Yes. He wears thick glasses, speaks under his breath and his hair is always uncombed. He also makes it a point to go to seminars and conferences on stuff like global warming and ecological imbalance and pores over journals at the city library. He is always talking about the damage that aerosols do to the ozone layer and these things rub off. Accordingly, I filled my bookrack with highbrow volumes bound in leather with gold lettering like the type you see in a lawyer's chambers.

The titles ranged from the merely snobbish classics of Leo Tolstoy to the works of D H Lawrence and even the ultra-snobbish tomes of verse by T S Eliot. Impressive was the word that sprang to mind when my bookshelf was examined. Naturally I walked with my nose high in the air. Although I kept a sharp eye open for doggy pooh after a bad experience. Gosh! I must have spent a fortune on deodorants and colognes.

So, when I went to my buddy Dinesh's house the other day I was astounded to see his bookshelf. From left to right and top to bottom the only reading matter it displayed were whodunnits and spy thrillers. I was aghast. It boggled the mind. It ill becomes an intellectual with thick glasses and matted hair to be associated with cheap literature. And I told him so. In fact, I beseeched him to come to his senses. I even offered to take him to a good therapist. But Dinu was like the rock of Gibraltar. Immovable. He even had the temerity and gall to lend me a few of his thrillers and detective novels. Well, having nothing more to lose than my self-respect and reputation I accepted them.

Six months have passed since and my bookrack wears a new look. It now displays the works of David Baldacci, James Rollins, Lee Child and yes, Dan Brown too. As for the leather-bound volumes of Tolstoy, Lawrence and Eliot, they are now to be found in a secondhand bookshop in the lane adjoining our block of apartments.

That's right. I have turned over a new leaf. These days I wear only graphic tees and



distressed jeans and long unbrushed hair and expound on contemporary literature,  
modern classics and cult poetry with my nose high in the air.

And, of course, a sharp eye peeled for doggy pooh.

eco imbalance . . .  
the speaker pauses  
to break wind

## Home

Diana Webb, UK

a ring-necked parakeet  
perched on the birdfeeder  
many greens of summer

Who will sit at the top of the table presiding over the giant teapot under its well-worn cosy when we all meet up as a family again and sit around for tea? Cucumber sandwiches. Bread and butter with homemade jam. A cake with lemon-lime flavoured drizzle.

the cosy  
removed for darning  
a wood pigeon's coo

## **Coronavirus**

Antonio Mangiameli, Italy

I had never spent so much time at home before.

snoring  
when she's not talking  
my wife

## Nest

sanjuktaa asopa, India

I remember how in our thirties, we dreamt about having a house of our own. We visited site after site and then, after years, found what we were looking for, a small plot of land, opposite a forest of Eucalyptus. How we scrimped and saved for months on end and brick by brick, the house began to take shape. First one floor, then another. The windows to let the woods in, the skylights to gaze at the North star. A narrow cobbled path, a handkerchief lawn, a birdbath. The endless arguments about the flooring and the kitchen tiles before the house was completed. Calendar pages have flipped many times since then. My parents fell ill here, my daughter became a bride in this house and now we grow old within its walls. But we still argue and fight about whether or not to repaint, to go for lacy curtains or bamboo blinds, or the size of the pebbles in the garden, everything in fact . . . except the colour of the windows.

summer rain . . .  
her eyes now  
a deeper green

## Caught short

Marietta McGregor, Australia

After WWII my husband's mother moves with her first-born child to a regional Victorian town a day's train ride from the State capital of Melbourne. In the 1950s, names and phone numbers are listed in a fat book called the White Pages, distributed free to households with telephone connections. Catalogue-like, these books are printed on thin white paper with yellow cardboard covers. In bigger towns with lots of phone lines, they're so bulky strongmen show off by tearing them in half. Old issues are used as doorstops or table leg props. When postwar shortages of lavatory paper and/or money occur, which is often, people resort to drilling a hole through the top corner of the White Pages and hooking them on a nail in the backyard outhouse. These days it's called re-purposing, then it was out of necessity.

My mother-in-law finds herself in a rented cottage with a phone line but no phone book. She and her widowed sister put on their jackets and walk to the town post office, where phone books are kept behind the counter for new customers. A sloe-faced counter attendant gives the two city-slickers a country once-over — long hard stare starting low and working upwards, pausing to evaluate coat, skirt, blouse and hair — and drawls, "Yairs, what?" A polite request for a new White Pages from my mother-in-law. "What's yer phone number? Wait." The surly woman disappears into a back room. A loud whispered conversation ensues, audible to the sisters. "They want it for dunny paper!" Mortified by this at the time, the sisters laugh about it later. "She thought we looked poor!"

country town  
the give-away sign  
of a dropped hem

## Virtual Reality

Robert Erlandson, USA

For as far back as I can remember, just before I fall asleep, I reach a familiar place, a feeling of comfort and calm. It feels real, physical.

memories  
of grandmother's eiderdown  
sunset clouds

## Déjà vu

Simon Hanson, Australia

The whole scene was more than familiar, a constellation of sorts, an alignment of happenings and place — the afternoon sun shimmering on the sea, water softly lapping on the shore, the long curve of sand around the bay, islands of beach towels and umbrellas — all a little hazy in the summer heat . . . vague recollections of a dream, a slip in the fabric of space and time, a glimpse into a parallel universe or a trick of the brain suddenly awash with feeling — that song on the radio, the scent of coconut oil drifting on the breeze, playing with my memory, drifting through my mind . . .

passion fruit  
transported decades  
in a split second

## Catching a Drift

Kat Lehmann, USA

Why bind the infinite with the finite? Why anchor what is free to the spectra of sight and sound? And what unknown fish swim beneath the surface of the skin?

thin ice  
over a deep lake  
philosophies



**Thus Have I Heard . . .**

Matthew Caretti, USA

When he pulls up slowly toward intersection traffic. Smiles. Discourses on his fast. Asks me to consider for a moment hunger. Its source. Its end. The body feels; the mind endures. One meal each day is enough. But breaking the fast, he confides, does bring joy. I nod toward the green light and the line of cars pulling away from us. But he wants to share more. To move beyond the manifest to the more esoteric. The meditative states. The prayers and incantations. The compassionate acts and abstinence. The power of his guru. Holding forth, he raises a gentle hand to wave at the car blaring its horn as it passes, all peace and loving-kindness in his flowing, white *baju*. We arrive. Yet he continues as I reach for my wallet.

dashboard Ganesha

the driver explains

karma

## The autumn sea, the universe and me

Carmela Marino, Italy (EC)

I'm sitting on a log, caressed by the breeze, while my gaze is lost in the movement.

I raise my hoodie to stare at this immensity: the sea, then the sky.

I listen and hold everything in a long breath

I'm just a point of the universe, but I'm grateful for what surrounds me.

I feel that someone is holding my hand.

sand in the wind  
no star  
resembles the other

Gathering empty shells, I speak to the wind, to the waves and grains of sand

I'm not afraid!

And as I squeeze the sound of the sea in my fists, I stop to watch the sunset on the shoreline.

Everything moves, It becomes light and slowly

thoughts dissolve

I walk away, but this time I'm not alone.

My shoes are full of sand and salt, and the sound of the sea accompanies me

timeless . . .  
feathers and footprints  
and grain of sand

## Woven In

Jenny Fraser, New Zealand

A low grey winter sky. Thin bands of gold stretch the horizon.  
Tuhua Island a faint blur, Motuotau Island a cold blue silhouette.  
Wrapped in a couple of coats she returns to the car for another.  
Sits on the edge of the dunes cloaked in thought.

stratocumulus  
the shadow as a wave builds  
and breaks

A shift. One breath. A long deep inhale. Rhythmic breathing  
begins. Slow waves start to sound and rise. One crisp tui note.

cicadas . . .  
a midge cloud dances  
winter grey

Eyes catch the wavering path of a monarch. A tiny figure along  
the shoreline. Flight of white spray. The dunes weave her in.  
Simple things bring her back.

prayer-pew  
the song of earth  
in flight

## **Barefoot**

Maureen Virchau, USA

I pick up shells while the others swim. I do not wish to swim or talk or sing. I only wish to be quiet, to think of you, to listen to the sounds of the ocean, to hold the halves of oyster shells and wonder where the other halves have gone.

alone

two for one margaritas

along the boardwalk

## Unloved fog

Eduard Schmidt-Zorner, Ireland

Standing in the door, I listen to the morning. No bird is singing. Fog puts a hand on the heart.

In a hole in the fog stands a tired moon, white and naked. One can feel a breath of air. It comes in individual blows, ruffles the fog and drives it apart in shreds.

I switch on the light to prepare tea. The parlour is small, a white table with books and an unopened letter; three white chairs.

An armchair at the window, an unpacked suitcase near the wall.

The wings of moths throw fancy silhouettes in the moonlight when they touch the pane.

A barely audible sound like the opening of a newspaper.

An early bluebottle flies through the room, does another round and hits against the window pane.

The white sky turns bluish. The sun, which had been visible only as a burning lent behind the clouds, makes an appearance.

Like a wheel which never ceases to turn, slowly, relentless, so turns our world;

from the night into the day and again sliding back into the night, the darkness.

blurred dream memories  
faint melodies  
of a humming fly

## Editor's choices haibun (EC)

### Does Time Stop After Wildfires

Scott Hicks, USA

Haze bronzes the morning sky. The hills are barren, but swelling for a fresh start. Sadness remains like old barbed wire fence posts along the two miles of asphalt snaking through granite mounds once shaded by oaks and sycamores; sun on the cooler side of noon. One house spared; in a swale another's river-rock chimney.

shades of new grass and poppies  
on a lone perch  
the mockingbird calls

*This haibun by Scott Hicks is a poignant one, poised between the destruction of wildfires and hope of a rebirth of nature after a purging cleansing. The effect is achieved by his use of vivid imagery. Barbed wire fence posts becomes a metaphor for the sadness of destruction. A lone chimney remains made of river rock - an acute observation which increases the pathos by suggesting elements of water, stone and fire. Something through which fire escapes embodies the fire itself. The haiku completes the pervading sense of loss and yet renewal with the haunting call of the mockingbird.*

~~~~~

The old man who doesn't know who he is

Tim Gardiner, UK

eight fifteen basement documents pika don floor dust screams above ruins crawl black
smoke night fall half-moon skeletal dome baby cry naked man fire water spout gums
bleed silhouette

shadow girl jumping cloud shadow

In memory of Eizo Nomura (1898-1982), the nearest survivor (170 m) to the hypocenter of Hiroshima atomic bomb

Tim Gardiner uses a torrent of words like a deluge of debris in which all familiar elements of life are scattered asunder to create a haunted physical and mental space of terror. The moon is a spectral witness to the utter destruction and desolation. The haiku underlines this diabolical aftermath of the bomb. As Celan urged:

“ . . . Speak-
But don't split off No from Yes.
Give your say this meaning too:
Give it the shadow.

Give it shadow enough . . .”

(Speak, You Too by Paul Celan)

A timely write as the city of Hiroshima marked the 75th anniversary on 6th August this year.

~~~~~

### **The autumn sea, the universe and me**

Carmela Marino, Italy

I'm sitting on a log, caressed by the breeze, while my gaze is lost in the movement.

I raise my hoodie to stare at this immensity: the sea, then the sky.

I listen and hold everything in a long breath

I'm just a point of the universe, but I'm grateful for what surrounds me.

I feel that someone is holding my hand.

sand in the wind  
no star  
resembles the other

Gathering empty shells, I speak to the wind, to the waves and grains of sand

I'm not afraid

And as I squeeze the sound of the sea in my fists, I stop to watch the sunset on the shoreline.

Everything moves, It becomes light and slowly

thoughts dissolve

I walk away, but this time I'm not alone.

My shoes are full of sand and salt, and the sound of the sea accompanies me

timeless . . .  
feathers and footprints  
and grain of sand

*Finally, a contemplative piece by Carmela Marino, who writes about points in an infinite expanse - sand on the beach, stars in the sky each one unique, not a crowd but points of solitary awareness. This is made explicit in the haiku. In the prose, gratitude and wonder at the privilege of beholding this immensity drive out any fear of the void. As she returns from her self-dissolving contemplation she finds in the sand, salt and sea a companionship with the universe.*

Sonam Chhoki



# Youth



Gulf Fritillary Butterfly (*Agraulis vanillae*) - Costa Rica

### Small Drops, Finally a Flood

A Tamil saying, *siru thulli, perum vellam*, can be translated as *small drops, finally a flood*.

The ancient Sanskrit work, *Hitopadesha*, in a practical message to all aspirants, notes, "With the falling of just drops of water, the pot gradually fills up. So is the case with acquisition of all knowledge and pursuits".

Julia Carney's immortal lines, from her poem, "Little Things":

Little drops of water,  
Little grains of sand,  
Make the mighty ocean  
And the pleasant land.  
So the little minutes,  
Humble though they be,  
Make the mighty ages  
Of eternity.

Yes, surely little drops make the mighty ocean, and those ticking moments, seen through haikai eyes, leave an everlasting impression on young minds. With this fond hope I began teaching haiku to school kids in 2006 – that seems like a long, long time ago. I have taught haikai poetry, comprising haiku, senryu, tanka, haibun, renku and haiga, to approximately 800 students so far. We all know that to start something from scratch takes time. It has! Poets now tell me that haikai lit is flourishing in India – can we say, slow and steady wins the race?

Hoping this momentum overleaps itself!

Kala Ramesh

**The Tejas Award** (Tejas in Sanskrit means “fire” and/or “brilliance”) **goes to the young guns Kakul Gupta** (14 yrs) and **Ishaan Singh Sarna** (15 yrs), both from India, for the amazing poems they have been sharing in *Triveni*, a FaceBook forum I started in 2013 to enable Indians to come under one umbrella to promote, enjoy, and sink deeper into the beauty and intricacies of all things connected to Japanese short forms of poetry. Besides other members world-wide, it has over 400 Indian members of all ages, many of them actively participating in furthering their knowledge of haikai.

I find in both Kakul’s and Ishaan’s thought process a maturity far beyond their age.

mango pickle  
the migrant’s first meal  
at home

new town —  
the florist's display  
begins to wilt

isolation ward —  
I count  
the remaining leaves

lockdown  
a chatter of crows  
from rooftop

*Kakul Gupta, 14 yrs*  
*India*

On 24 March 2020, the Government of India ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, limiting movement of the entire 1.3 billion-member population of India as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indian migrant workers during the pandemic have faced multiple hardships. With factories and workplaces shut down, millions of migrant workers have had to deal with loss of income, food shortages and uncertainty about their future. Many migrant workers and their families went hungry. Thousands of them then began walking back home, with no means of transport due to the lockdown.

Let me examine this ku:

mango pickle  
the migrant's first meal  
at home

*mango pickle* is a seasonal reference that brings back so many memories for us – so Indian in its essence. This kigo word forms the base of Kakul's poem. I have nothing more to say about this ku. . . but I would like to quote this beautiful observation by Vijay Prasad, a member of Triveni:

*... 'total understanding' is the 'death of a poem' ...  
After each reading, there is always "the remains of the reading," which is eternally  
attached to each poem.*

\*\*

layered bruises . . .  
spilling my secrets  
into the teddy's ears

This senryu by Ishaan Singh Sarna is also one of my favourites. The layering of each word and each line is masterfully handled. Who would guess this was written by a 15-year-old school kid?

It's a mini film that reveals, as we go deeper into the image, a tender child, who has no human being to turn to and spills his/her secrets into the teddy's ears.

Now we come back to L1, wondering what those layered bruises might mean — they could suggest so many things, from incest to plain insults and abuses.

\*\*

### **A Cold Horror**

When I went to a winter camp for the first time, in 8th grade, I had little knowledge about surviving in the open. I'd no idea that I'd be exposed to the wild animals that roamed about the forests and chilly winds that threatened to convert me into an icicle; that I'd have to pitch my own tent, cook my own food with the minimal ingredients, and so on...

But all those things were manageable. What *wasn't* was the horror-story sessions over the crackling bonfire, after dinner. When we were done with cooking and hesitantly eating our food, we gathered enough wood to light a fire and warm ourselves, and, in the dead of night, narrate our paranormal experiences.

A friend of mine, a chubby, little geek, peed his pants while he recounted his spine-chilling tale of how he saw a headless woman with a dead chicken in her palm in his basement. Another lad came up with the story of his grandfather and great-uncle dying of the same disease and haunting the family bungalow. The stories went on and on, till our instructors whistled us back to our tents.

After all those stories of women with Dracula teeth, eyeless men, and young boys at the PSO who disappeared as soon as one opened the door, it was very obvious that no sane person could go to sleep, especially in those cramped tents with a smelly guy who snored like a bear.

But gathering all my strength, I shut my eyes tightly, hoping sleep would strike me soon. Tossing and turning in my sleep, I thought I sensed an uncanny movement around me.

Even today, I can't remember who lit the bonfire again and jammed to the Beatles.

first birdsong . . .  
the layers of night  
peel off

*Ishaan Singh Sarna – 15 yrs,  
India*

\*\*\*\*\*

The Editor's Choice goes to a budding poet this time and not to any individual haiku!  
Read these poems from a 14-year old girl from Turkey:

evening storm  
the sun's last light  
lost

I have never encouraged the use of a single word on a line, for that word has to carry the weight of the whole line. Not easy! This is masterfully done!

a pile of shavings  
once  
a pencil

Minimalism at its best, coming from a school kid!

morning birdsong  
an aftermath  
to a silent dawn

One wouldn't generally use the word aftermath in connection to a birdsong! But I was reminded that Ramana Maharshi has rightly said "Silence is ever-speaking, it is the perennial flow of language".

It is interrupted by speaking, for words destroy this mute language. Silence is unceasing eloquence.

I gathered all this from that single word *aftermath!*

winter beach  
a forgotten shoe  
out of one wave's reach

I can see this! Most beautifully captured.

street musicians offerings accepted

An effective one-line ku.

I see a street musician playing his heart out – hoping for some good soul to drop a coin or two into his empty bowl . . . busy people just keep passing by, taking his music for granted!

mirrored  
in her jewelry  
a thousand sunsets

*Almila Dükel - 14 yrs, Turkey*

\*\*\*

Now we move on to the rest of the children's haiku, senryu and tanka, which are equally beautiful and well written.

school assembly . . .  
my attention goes to  
an ant on the floor

*V. Krishna Sai Gayatri, age 15*  
*India*

\*\*

lunch bell  
hundreds of fingers attack  
my lunch box

village fair  
a little girl's cry  
fills the air

*Lakshmi R Menon - 15 yrs,*  
*India*

\*\*



I thank Tom Painting, for these brilliant senryu from students. I loved reading and mulling over what lies in these young minds--and how COVID-19 may have affected them. I'm so happy Tom asked them to pen their feelings. On first glance, they all looked alike, but when I went through them a second time, I was drawn into the students' struggle to cope up with this strange isolation. Even my 91-year old mother says her World War II experiences were not this scary or this tedious.

six feet away  
the feeling of forever  
apart

*Camille McIlvoy - 11 yrs*  
USA

crisscrossing  
the sidewalk  
social distancing

*Russell Hardin - 11 yrs,*  
USA

virtual learning  
the call disconnects  
my train of thought

*Catherine Dwyer - 13 yrs,*  
USA

self-isolation

I miss the sound  
of someone else's opinion

self-isolation

no one is present  
to hear my thoughts

stormy night

the power cuts off  
my virtual learning

*Catherine Dwyer - 13 yrs*  
*USA*

virtual learning

solitary confinement  
in my darkened room

*Andrew Reveno - 13 yrs*  
*USA*

virtual learning

the computer's  
upper hand

*Eliza Haverstick - 12 yrs*  
*USA*

virtual learning  
the glow of my iPad  
lights me up

*Ashima Gandhi - 11 yrs*  
*USA*

virtual learning  
time for school  
downstairs

*Russell Hardin - 11 yrs,*  
*USA*

virtual learning  
are we still together  
in reality?

*Callaghan Finnegan - 11 yrs,*  
*USA*

\*\*

hissing trees  
the wind slaps  
like a father

slit in a tree  
edged by crinkled sap  
an amber glow

*Pratham Rajeevalochan - 16 yrs,*  
*India*

how far  
can they jump  
to pluck stars  
for mommy . . .  
five little monkeys

*Ishaan Singh Sarna - 15 yrs*  
*India*

\*\*\*

Our cattails Youth contributors, Ishaan Singh Sarna and Praniti Gulyani, conducted a two-day haiku workshop, *A Fistful of Words*, in Delhi in June 2020. Hosted by *The Narrow Road Journal*, around 20 young participants from all parts of the world, ranging from Scotland to Singapore and Bangalore, joined in this workshop.

Praniti says:

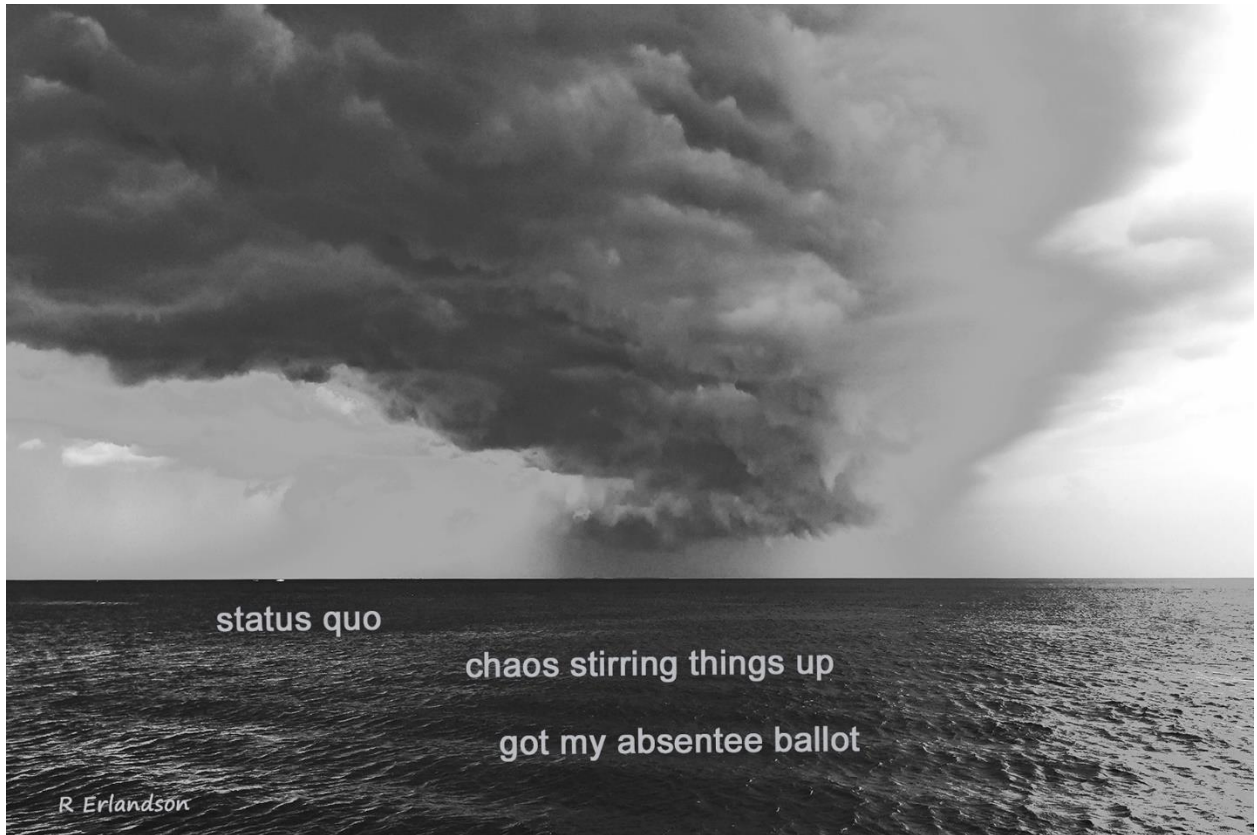
We concluded the workshop with a brief introduction to haibun, and since then, the haiku bug has not left our participants! We are forming haiku sequences, writing new haiku on new prompts, and learning together. The journey of a thousand miles truly begins with a single step, and the first step has been taken so beautifully, and it gives us a great sensation of joy to see our group attempting to grow and become better every day.

Many of the participants have had their work shortlisted for the youth corner of *Under the Basho*, and are soon to be published there.



belated conversation  
she remembers only  
the color of his shoes

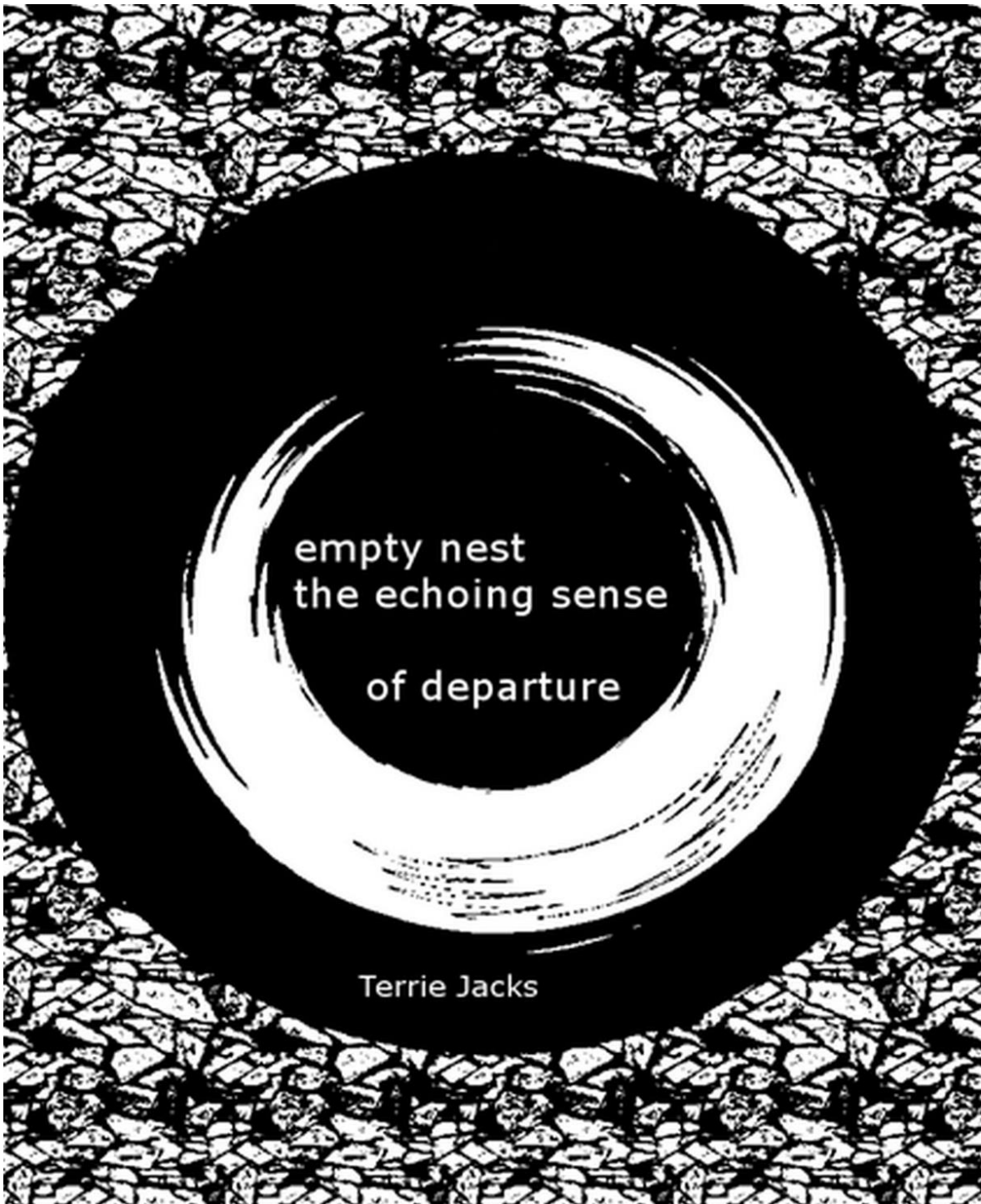
photo: Daniela Targova haiga: Radka Mindova





**Haiku: Silva Trstenjak**  
**Photo: Rebeka Pfeifer**









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